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EDITORIAL

Belarus Is Ripe for G-8's Attention!

There are a number of valid reasons why the current situation in Belarus requires addressing at the July 15-17 G-8 summit in St. Petersburg. The non-legitimacy of the Belarus' "head of state," Aleksandr Lukashenka, is one of them. Another is that Belarus is on the verge of losing its independence and sovereignty by entering into a "union state" with Russia. A third is the continuing dismal human rights situation in the country.

So there is a lot that can and should be discussed. For example, what to do with Lukashenka, who managed to change illegally the constitution last year so that he could run for president an unlimited number of times? The rigged presidential election this year and what to expect in the future—Belarus another Cuba or ... a province of Russia. The Russian politicians would love the latter scenario. After ten years of jockeying, what is left is for Putin and Lukashenka to initial the draft union state constitution and have it approved by a national referendum in both countries. No doubt the Russians will go for it in the hope of recreating their lost empire. And in Belarus, it will be up to Lukashenka to determine what number of votes he needs to pass, or not to pass, the referendum. It will all depend on which number will better serve his own ego—the status quo, turning to Europe, or giving in to Russian pressure.

One thing is certain: the knotty case of Belarus can't be resolved without dealing with Russia. The upcoming G-8 summit presents the ideal opportunity to discuss this problem. Unfortunately, however, Russia will be presiding and Russia has made it clear that Belarus-Russia relations as well as Belarus' internal affairs are strictly their own business. Russia will thus press hard to keep the issue off the summit agenda. Russia must not be allowed to succeed with this crude maneuver. According to some reports, the attempt will be made to raise the subject at the June 29 Moscow meeting of G-8 foreign ministers. And here again, the meeting will be chaired by Russia. It also should be noted that Russia is the current chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

So what are the chances for the Belarus case reaching the G-8 level? The odds don't look favorable for Belarus—that is to say not for a democratic, independent Belarus.

There has been some talk within the U.S. and EU about the need for discussing the case of Belarus at the G-8 level

to cover such items as the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus, suppression of human rights and Russia's use of natural gas supplies as a tool to force Belarus to integrate into the Russian Federation. The U.S. has taken a more aggressive stance while the EU prefers a softer approach.

Vice President Dick Cheney, in his May 4 speech at the 2006 Vilnius Conference of leaders from the Baltic and Black Sea region, was blunt about the situation in Belarus. He said: "All of us are committed to democratic progress in Belarus. That nation has suffered in major wars and experienced terrible losses, and now its people are denied basic freedoms by the last dictatorship in Europe. With us today are democracy advocates from Belarus ... The world knows what is happening in Belarus. Peaceful demonstrators have been beaten, dissidents have vanished, and a climate of fear prevails under a government that subverts free elections and bans your own country's flag. There is no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind. The people of Belarus deserve better. You have the right to determine your destiny. And your great nation has a future in the community of democracies."

At another point, Mr. Cheney chided Russia for seeking to reverse its reforms and for using oil and gas as tools of intimidation or blackmail of its neighbors. And he added: "And no one can justify actions that undermine the territorial integrity of a neighbor or interfere with democratic movements."

Western Europe, just as Belarus, depends heavily on Russia's natural gas and oil supplies—hence the desire not to irritate Russia. That kind of sentiment could be observed at the June 1 European Conference of Presidents of Parliament held in Tallinn, Estonia. While Russia and the organization's other members remain divided on a common Belarus policy, PACE President Rene van der Linden, in his effort to explore the possibilities of parliamentary diplomacy, said that "there are no differences ... when it comes

to looking for ways in opening dialogue" with the ex-Soviet state. While in Finland next day, he said: "I welcome the intention ... [of the European Union] to make improving EU-Russia relations a priority ... The European Union has missed opportunities in its relations with Russia in recent years, but the coincidence of [upcoming] Finland's Presidency of the EU with Russia's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers is an excellent opportunity to begin putting this right." He also met President Putin in Moscow on June 5.

And in Belarus: Some prominent members of the intelligentsia agreed May 25 on sending Putin a letter asking for the inclusion of the Belarus question into the G-8

"The entire international community knows that Lukashenko is the last dictator in Europe.

The Russians say his election was legitimate and so forth and so on. So we have our differences."

US Secretary Condoleezza Rice, describing US relations with Russia, in an interview with the NBC editorial board, New York City, May 8, 2006.

agenda. Also, members of the opposition visited Germany at the end of May where they submitted an appeal to Chancellor Angela Merkel, asking G-8 members to address the situations in Belarus, the illegitimacy of the presidential campaign, and the subject of political prisoners.

Mr. Lukashenka, in his most recent statement said that Belarus won't sell its Beltransgaz to the Russian Gazprom at its current book value; that Belarus is not against raising the price on gas supplies as long as that price would be the same as that for Russia's users; that the idea of integration with Russia remains unchanged, but Belarus will never become a part of the Russian Federation; and that an early introduction of single currency would be like putting the cart before the horse. "The question of currency should be addressed in the union state constitution, which will be adopted via a referendum," he said.

We hope that the G-8 members find a way to discuss the internal situation in Belarus and convince Russia that the incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Federation would be in the best interest of neither. We would like to see Russia approach this subject in the spirit of the Budapest CSCE (now OSCE) summit of December 1994 where Russia, along with the US and UK, committed to respect Belarus' independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Joe Arciuch
Editor-at-Large

From the Publisher

The March elections in Belarus and the subsequent protests, followed by the inevitable arrests and wholesale detentions, have been prominently featured in the world press. Since then the regime has intensified the repressions against individual political figures, youth activists, and the society as a whole. Other than an occasional article about the visa bans against the regime's key people announced by the European Union and the United States, and the scholarship support for students expelled for political reasons, the interest in Belarusian affairs has faded.

Providing objective information from the outside to the people of Belarus, deprived of practically all independent media, will be the key need. So will be informing the outside world about the worsening situation in Belarus. That will remain the primary task of Belarusian Review. Our thanks go out to our subscribers and to our more generous contributors. That list contains many familiar names from previous years: **Anatol Lukjanczuk, Alice Kipel, Eugene Kazan, Alla Orsa Romano, Nicholas Snieszko, Karnella Najdziuk, Wanda Gajdel Joy, Witold Romuk, Anatol Sankovitch, Alesya Semukha, Irene Kalada Smirnov, Matthew Smorstok, Olga Wilson, Peter Kasaty, Larysa Dubovik, Jan Zaprudnik. Rusak/Grant families have made a contribution in memory of Francis and Vera Bartul.**

DID YOU RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION ?

U.S. blocks assets of Belarus president

as reported by AP on June 19, 2006

The Treasury Department added Lukashenka to its list of specially designated nationals, meaning that any assets belonging to Lukashenka found in the U.S. must be blocked and Americans are forbidden from doing business with him. Other Belarus government officials also added to the United States' blocking list include: the minister of justice; the national security adviser; the minister of internal affairs, chief of the Belarusian KGB; chief of the central commission for elections and national referendums and the head of the Belarusian State Television and Radio Co.

FEATURES

Suspension of Entry to US Proclaimed by President Bush

The proclamation starts with following preamble:

In light of the importance to the United States of fostering democratic institutions in Belarus in order to help the Belarusian people achieve their aspirations for democracy and to help complete the transformation to a Europe whole, free, and at peace and given the suppression of human rights and democracy in Belarus, the fraud perpetrated during the recent Belarusian presidential campaign and election, the detention of peaceful protesters in Belarus, the persistent acts of corruption by Belarusian government officials in the performance of public functions, and the continued failure of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Belarusian government officials, and others to support the rule of law, human rights commitments, and other principles of high priority to the United States, I have determined that it is in the interest of the United States to take all available measures to restrict the international travel and to suspend the entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, of members of the government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and others detailed below who formulate, implement, participate in, or benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus.

Based on the above, President George W. Bush issued a proclamation on 15 May, 2006 that suspended the entry to the United States of the persons listed below:

(a) Members of the government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and other persons who formulate, implement, participate in, or benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus;

(b) Persons who through their business dealings with Belarusian government officials derive significant financial benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus; and (c) The spouses of persons described in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

This proclamation is effective immediately and shall remain in effect until such time as the Secretary of State determines that it is no longer necessary and should be terminated, either in whole or in part.

Memorandum of the Executive Council of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic In Exile

1. The Executive Council of the *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile (BNR *Rada*) having considered the 19 March 2006 presidential elections in Belarus as well as the preceding and subsequent events, and noting in particular that

- the nomination of Alexander Lukashenka for presidency for the third term was unconstitutional and no democratic legitimacy had been secured for a revision of that norm;
- in the course of the presidential campaign the incumbent regime effectively denied the electorate access to information necessary for making a free and informed choice;
- the "elections" that took place on 19 March 2006 were neither free nor fair, and although the authenticity of the figures released has not been supported by any evidence, the results were forced on society solely by application of massive police violence;

hereby **concludes and declares** that Alexander Lukashenka shall not be regarded as occupying the position of the President of Belarus legitimately, and therefore the office of the head of state in Belarus shall be regarded as usurped.

2. Since crimes against the human rights and humanity transcend international borders, the Executive Council of the *Rada* of the Belarusian Democratic Republic:

- accepts that democratic nations will be justified, on the basis of the principle of democratic solidarity, in taking measures of assistance to the Belarusian nation to regain its right freely to choose its government and destiny and to enjoy justice, fundamental human rights and political freedoms.

- therefore **calls** on the governments of the member-states of the EU, NATO, and in particular the leaders of the G8 democratic states to assist Belarusian society in regaining its freedom.

3. The Executive Council of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, recognising that transition to a government formed by free and fair elections in Belarus will require:

- the end to persecution and repression, the release of all political prisoners in good time to partake in the political process;

- the introduction of democratic electoral legislation, guaranteed by law and enforced in practice, the elections' independent supervision, and the electorate's unrestricted access to free information in good time;

- therefore **observes** that the existing ability of the leader and chief members of the incumbent regime to continue the abuse of their present positions of authority must necessarily be inhabited in order that the implementation of these conditions may become possible.

4. In the view of the regime's self-isolation, comprehensive instruments of sustained pressure and assistance must be a part of any effective solution, the Executive Council of BNR *Rada* firstly calls for

- sanctions against the external personal and corporate interests of the leaders and high-level functionaries of the regime;

- sanctions against the regime's ability to maintain a system of socio-political control over Belarusian society by keeping the majority of citizens dependent on the state for the material necessities of life.

5. Secondly, the Executive Council of the BNR *Rada* points out that sanctions against the ruling regime's interests need to be complemented by a comprehensive package of assistance. It therefore requests that all necessary assistance be offered to the pro-democracy community in Belarus, including

- international humanitarian measures to mitigate the hardships of individuals, and members of families, caused by political repression in Belarus;

- a comprehensive package of assistance to disseminate independent information and build an independent civil society infrastructure.

6. Thirdly, the Executive Council of the BNR *Rada* calls for new concerted efforts to mitigate the external factors inhibiting the restoration of democracy in Belarus, the single major one of which remains the policy of the Russian Federation. The BNR *Rada* points out that the government of the Russian Federation bears a substantial measure of responsibility for the violation of basic rights and freedoms in Belarus since currently the Russian Federation:

- acts as a party to the politically-brokered economic arrangements with the regime, providing it with the means to sustain stabilisation policies that would have been otherwise unsustainable;

- acts as a political advocate of Lukashenka's regime on the international scene.

7. The Executive Council of the BNR *Rada* additionally notes the present Russian state's responsibility with regard to the problems of democracy in Belarus. It was the Red Army of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, from which the Russian Federation maintains international legal succession today, that overran the Belarusian Democratic Republic in 1919-1920, forcing its *Rada* and Government into exile and caused Belarus to suffer a variety of territorial losses.

8. In this regard, the Executive Council of the BNR *Rada*:

- insists that Russia would refrain from taking unfair advantage of the current lack of a democratically accountable state authority in Belarus in particular by means of binding Belarus by commitments of military, economic, political or other nature;

- requests the international community's support in that regard.

9. Regarding all transactions of the regime currently holding power in Belarus with other entities, the BNR *Rada* recalls that inasmuch as Alexander Lukashenka occupies illegitimately the position of the head of state of Belarus, neither he nor persons acting under his authority, mandate or on his instructions possess legitimate power to confirm legal commitments or undertake obligations on behalf of the Belarusian state. Therefore all such acts shall be liable to be void of legal force for any future government or other legal entities in Belarus.

10. Under the circumstances described the BNR *Rada* and its Executive Council will be obliged to continue carrying out its historical mandate, in the capacities of Belarusian Representative Assembly and Government in Exile respectively, and passing it on to a future freely elected democratic government of an independent democratic Belarusian State.

Ivonka J. Survilla

President,

Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile.

Society and the Political Scene: Why is Belarus Different?

Belarus on the Eve of Elections was the subject of a round table discussion held at the Foreign Service Institute in February 2006. The edited presentations of one of the panels form the basis of this three-part article. The Historical Pre-conditions were addressed by the Publisher of this journal – Walter Stankievich, The Issue of Belarus-Russia Union by Alex Campbell, a Washington commentator, and Elections in Belarus and Ukraine -- Key Differences by RFE/RL analyst from Prague – Jan Maksymiuk.

The Historical Pre-conditions

By Walter Stankievich

The answer to the question why Belarus is different is based to a large degree on its historical background. It can be obtained by reviewing the key past events rather than just the current situation. This paper will evaluate some of the key factors of similarity and difference between Belarus and its closest non-Russian neighbors – Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. For the purpose of comparison the following four factors appear to be most influential: Ethnicity, religion, the existence of a diaspora, and the nature of the occupying power.

The most influential historical event is what is popularly known as the Partitions of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria. To be more specific, those partitions did affect Poland, however more critically they affected Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

Let us compare each state as they were at that time – the end of the 18th century:

Lithuania – Non-Slavic, Catholic, with an influential diaspora in Prussia and occupied fully by Russia, comparatively the most brutal occupier.

Poland -- Slavic, Catholic, with influential diaspora scattered throughout Europe, divided between Prussia, Austria and Russia with varying degrees of autonomy under Russian control, and some political freedom under Austria.

Ukraine -- Slavic, predominantly Orthodox and Uniate (former Orthodox), occupied mostly by Russia but with a significant portion (the province of Galicia) occupied by Austria.

Belarus -- Slavic, predominantly Uniate at that time, with significant numbers of Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants, without outside diaspora and fully occupied by Russia.

Guided by the motto of collecting so-called Russian lands and presumably protecting the rights of their Orthodox co-religionists, the process of century-long russification takes place in all lands occupied by Russia, but particularly in those with Orthodox populations and without a significant and supportive diaspora.

Belarus fits that model most closely.

Within decades of occupation, the Uniate Church is liquidated and its believers are given a choice of returning to the Orthodox Church of their forebears with a liturgy familiar to them, or joining the Roman Catholic Church. The resulting growth of both churches calls for additional Catholic clergy from Poland and trusted Orthodox clergy from Russia. The foreign influence in both churches results in weakening the national unity along religious lines, with the population beginning to identify with either the 'Polish faith' or the 'Russian faith'. The introduction of the Russian legal system followed, as did massive importation of Russian officialdom and Orthodox clergy, and the liquidation of all institutions of higher learning in Belarus. Belarusian language education was prohibited at any level, as was Belarusian printing. The rampant russification culminated in its territory becoming officially known as the North-Western Land.

What was the situation in the neighboring lands at this time? Poland, however divided and oppressed politically and economically, was able to develop culturally. Lithuania through the help of its Prussian diaspora was able to eventually experience national revival. Ukraine was able to advance educationally and to a degree – politically under a more benevolent Austrian occupation in Galicia.

At the end of World War I and the breakup of the Russian Empire all these nations declared their independence. Some were more successful than others in actually maintaining it for a longer time. Their proximity to the newly emerging Soviet Russia, as well as outside support or the lack of it, determined their success. Lithuania counted on support from Germany and Poland from the Western Allies. Ukraine and Belarus did not have such support, and while Ukrainian forces fought valiantly for a few years, and Belarusians – a shorter time, both countries ended up re-occupied and divided along the line of ceasefire which ended the Polish-Soviet war.

In the period between the two wars Poland and Lithuania strengthened their national independence, so that after renewed Soviet Russian control and occupation, their Communist leaders remained Poles and Lithuanians first. In Ukraine the national situation was not as clear. But it was in Belarus, where the predominantly Russian Partisan leadership parachuted in World War II behind German lines into the deep Belarusian forests, that it was disastrous. The Partisan leaders were able after the war to establish control locally and thus intensify the previous russification. As an example, by 1980, there was not a single Belarusian language school in the capital and all of the higher education was conducted in Russian.

To better understand the current situation in Belarus it is essential to know the pre-conditions that served to establish the behavior and mood of its society. Alexander Milinkevich – the unity candidate of the democratic forces for the presidency, stated repeatedly that the main obstacle for victory of democracy is the **people's deep-seated feeling of fear**. The other pre-conditions would be the **older generation's nostalgia** for the simpler times of the Brezhnev stagnation era, and possibly, very critical, yet not so readily acknowledged pre-condition – **the Belarusians' nearly universal lack of awareness of their distinguished historical past**.

Soviet historians rewrote the country's history by claiming that Belarusian nationhood began through the formation of the Soviet Union, and then only thanks to the help of Russia. The population in general did not know that it can be proud of their country's thousand year history that originated in the city of Polatsk, a worthy rival to Kiev's rule in the region, and which significantly pre-dated the origins of Moscow. Belarus later played a key role in the multi-ethnic state known as the Grand Duchy of Litva (Lithuania in its Latinized form). It was in that era that the first Bible in Eastern Europe was printed in Old Belarusian, as was, highly progressive for the 16th century, the Code of Laws. That state at its peak stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and subsequently by forming a Commonwealth with Poland, lasted six centuries. Three hundred years of intermittent foreign incursions and wars finally led to the annexation of all Belarusian territories into the aggressively expanding Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century, the time when a new democracy was just being formed in America. The subsequent 200 years of russification led to Belarusians' virtual loss of historical memory. The various wars on its territory followed, culminating in World War II, around which as a result of purges, deportations and war losses, Belarus lost a quarter of its population, and was nearly totally devastated. The fear of yet another war became dominant.

After decades of re-building following WW II, Belarus achieved relative stability and prosperity during the Brezhnev era. For the post-war generation it was a period of growth and development, thus it is not surprising that today's fiftyish or older Belarusians look back on that period with nostalgia, while forgetting its many negative aspects.

The fear of another war is reflected in the people's willingness to tolerate the prevailing abuse of their rights and the continuing deprivation. This acquiescence can be summed up by a frequently voiced phrase – “as long as there is no war”. President Lukashenka skillfully plays on this primal fear, and through his rule by decree, introduces a variety of new fears. For the business owners – the fear of the ever watchful and arbitrary ‘tax inspector’; for the government employees – the fear of losing their contract controlled job; for the journalists, political and civic activists – the fear of imprisonment, injury or even death if they write or act against the regime; for the student – the fear of being expelled from the university.

The many ingrown fears can be effectively eliminated by free access to information, coupled with freedom of

speech and assembly. Such information can also negate the illusory feeling of nostalgia, and can also bring about a sense of legitimate pride in the country's historical past. Democracy in Belarus is struggling and it needs at this time the kind of outside support that was given the neighboring states in the past. Historical experience has shown, that given even a limited amount of freedom, Belarusians quickly established their own cultural and political revival, as was the case in 1918, when after more than century of oppression they declared their independence. It was followed by impressive cultural revival during the NEP period in the USSR, as well as in western Belarus under Poland, and most recently, during a few short years of fledgling democracy in the early 90's.

The Issue of Belarus-Russia Union

By Alex Campbell

(The presentation was slightly updated by the author after the March 19 elections.)

It is my contention that at the root of all current Belarusian problems lies what I call ‘the Lukashenka factor’, so, consequently, their resolution is intrinsically bound to the elimination, or at least, the neutralization of this factor. **And there is no single issue that provides us with better opportunity to understand Alexander Lukashenka as a politician, than the issue of so-called Belarus-Russia integration.**

The creation of a regime of almost unchecked personal power was a tool and to a very large extent a consequence of Lukashenka's other political ambition – negotiating a merger with Russia that would allow him to be a contender for Kremlin throne itself. He viewed this as the first step in the creation of a nucleus of a reconstituted USSR, and this project has always been Lukashenka's idee-fix and his aspiration even before his election in 1994.

It is true, that the issue of relations between Belarus and Russia is too vast and complicated to be explained solely in terms of personal ambitions of one man. Obviously, political, ethno-cultural and economic factors have played a role. Nevertheless, analysis of information from both open and confidential sources leads us to the conclusion, that the decade-long process of Belarus –Russia integration or reunification can be best explained through the prism of ebb and flow of Lukashenka's political fortunes in the Russian political arena.

To understand current relations between Belarus and Russia -- this often incomprehensible ‘integration dance’ between Putin and Lukashenka -- we need to look back and put the whole Belarus-Russia issue into appropriate context based on the information, available to us now, 10 years later.

An important question with regard to what one Belarusian commentator called Lukashenka's ‘*Drang Nach Osten*’ is – when did he first contemplate the idea of the

union? Was it something prompted by political expediency, a move with which he tried to resolve current difficulties, or was it a cornerstone of his ideology, his *raison d'être* as a politician?

The truth is - Lukashenka never concealed his ideological leanings. In 1993, addressing a conference, organized by the 'red-browns' of the day he proclaimed that he is ready "to crawl on my knees to Russia", and that the only chance for Belarus to avoid a final disaster, is to create a state together with the other former Soviet republics, first of all - with Russia. Here's another sample of his rhetoric: *"It was on our soil (the Belavezha Forest) that the Great Union was destroyed, and it is from here that the movement to create a new Great State should spring. On our way to this goal, we should discard the worn-out idea of an economic union, we need to make a political decision."*

The idea of Soviet imperial revanche was the foundation of his political philosophy since the very beginning of his career, and he embarked on a relentless drive to re-integrate Belarus back into its formerly imperial neighbor to the east right after he won the presidential elections in 1994. Already in February 1995, while meeting with one of the most odious of Russian ultra-nationalists, Lukashenka, who often gets carried away when speaking to a sympathetic audience, declared: *"Belarus as a stage of my political career is over."* Later on his quest for Kremlin acquired even greater importance for him, when it became a means of securing his survival, especially when the allegations of his involvement in disappearances of political opponents, began to surface.

While some of us are probably familiar with Lukashenka's recent pronouncements about the importance of preserving the Belarusian sovereignty, let me remind you of one of his earlier pronouncements on this subject. Two months into his presidency he was quoted by the main state daily: *"I am not only a proponent of the unification of the two states -- Russia and Belarus. I am a supporter of the unification of all Slavic nations. This (Belarus-Russia union) is the nucleus around which all the nations of the former Soviet Union may consolidate"*. He went on saying that this future entity should be even more tightly knit than was the USSR. To achieve his stated goals, he soon staged a sham referendum to usurp unlimited power. While independent foreign and domestic human rights groups have documented a litany of abuses against opposition politicians and activists, NGO's, trade unions and the independent media -- the new government "nomenklatura" coupled with a security apparatus ever-growing in size and powers, and aided by corrupt businessmen, has become a reactionary force with vested interests in the survival of the regime. .

By 1996 Lukashenka's presidency descended into outright illegitimacy when he dissolved the elected parliament and forced constitutional changes that extended his first term. Since then, for almost 10 years there are no other legitimate branches of power in Belarus -- and this is another important point we need to keep in mind. This is the context in which many of today's problems first emerged. It was back then when the treaty on the customs union, and the agreement that bartered transit via Belarus'

pipelines for cheap Russian oil and gas were first signed. Belarus agreed to the free-of-charge use of two military bases on its soil by the Russians, and Moscow agreed to write-off a billion dollar energy debt.

Despite the vagueness of the first Union Treaty and its lack of implementation mechanisms, it created a dangerous legal foundation for further dilution of Belarusian sovereignty and for potential absorption of the country by Russia. The last ten years vividly demonstrated that the Kremlin skillfully exploited this crack, and step by step created such a legal trap for Belarus, that its possible annexation will look as nothing more than "the next logical step in the integration of two brotherly nations".

Situation changed with Vladimir Putin's ascension to power. As many Belarusian commentators remarked at the time - to say that Lukashenka was shocked by the news of Yeltsin's sudden resignation on the eve of 2000, which came literally days after the Russian leader signed another batch of integration papers, would be a gross understatement. Lukashenka was so stunned by this unexpected development, that he locked himself up for a whole week in his compound, refused to show himself in public and tried to drown his sorrow in vodka. The emergence in the Russian political arena of a new powerful player destroyed Lukashenka's designs. A new era started in Russia, but the worst for Lukashenka's Russia project was yet to come.

Putin soon proposed a complete merger on Russian terms -- an idea which became popular in Russia after years of Lukashenka's peddling the line of 'two inseparable Slavic brothers' in Moscow. Lukashenka tried to bargain, but as one shrewd Belarusian analyst remarked at the time, the former director of the state farm, who majored in history in a provincial college, was no match intellectually to a former professional KGB officer, trained by one of the best intelligence services, and a lawyer by education. Putin listened carefully to what the Belarusian leader had to say, and saw right through all the integrationist demagoguery. Putin ridiculed in the media Lukashenka's proposals as an attempt to revive the Soviet Union, quipping about the necessity 'to separate the flies from the cutlet'. Putin implied that 'the flies' -- that is, Lukashenka and his personal ambitions in the future union state -- should be separated from the "cutlet" -- the issue of the reunification of two nations, which, according to Putin, was predetermined by historical, cultural and economic factors. He infuriated Lukashenka even more by stating the obvious: *"Let's not forget that Belarus' economy equals to 3 per cent of Russia's"*, and made it clear that unification with Belarus is possible only on the basis of relative economic weight, and that from now on any integration would proceed on Russia's terms.

During the last year, in an amazing show of 'double-think', Lukashenka suddenly became the staunchest defender of Belarusian independence and reverted to his plan B, which he honed and perfected during Yeltsin's second term -- protecting his complete control over his own country.

And this, in a nutshell, is what has been going on between the two countries for the last several years: Lukashenka invents such new preconditions to unification,

that are virtually impossible for Moscow to meet, simultaneously fighting to preserve all of the benefits of the still-born Union State. This allows him to keep Belarusian economy afloat, and a guarantee that popular discontent does not exceed manageable proportions, as shown by the elections. At the same time, acutely aware of Russia's resurgent financial power, he sabotages cooperation in such areas of interest to Russia, as gas and oil infrastructure, and prevents expansion of Russian private capital in Belarus.

But Lukashenka's Pyrrhic victory in the March 19 presidential elections practically deprived him of the last vestiges of legitimacy in the eyes of the West, and may result in tectonic shifts in his political future. According to confidential sources, the price of Russian support for his bid for the third presidential term was the secret sale of the "crown jewel" of Belarusian economy – the Beltransgaz pipeline, and the expedited introduction of the Russian ruble. With every day it looks more and more that Moscow will try to cash in Lukashenka's IOUs.

Does Moscow not see through his game, and why would Kremlin allow itself to be duped by Lukashenka? In short -- yes, it does, but one factor outweighs everything -- even the well documented personal animosity between the two leaders, Western concerns about human rights and economic expediency.

This factor is Russia's resurgent imperial paranoia, the desire to once again control and dominate neighboring countries, but this time around it is supported not by its military might, but by its growing hoard of oil cash. Besides, Lukashenka is smart enough to keep Russia happy by fully cooperating in the military-industrial sphere (see his statements on the day after the elections), because it gives him a chance to position himself again as a 'staunch defender of the western borders of the union state' and the nucleus of the revived empire.

Nevertheless, it looks that so far his most ambitious project -- the attempt to barter his country for a throne in Kremlin, is temporary delayed. For him to agree to Russian merger terms today is tantamount to personal humiliation and a complete reversal of some of his recent public proclamations. Lukashenka is hated by a significant part of the population and cannot step down for fear of being held accountable for numerous human rights violations, and, what's even more ominous for him -- for his alleged involvement in political assassinations and shadowy arms deals.

If Lukashenka's regime is left unopposed, Belarus will become an even more dangerous laboratory for experiments with dictatorship. If this glaring contempt for democracy and the rule of law is not taken care of in a timely manner, the West will soon see even more of this contagious disease in many of the former Soviet republics further east. Judging by the recent trends in Moscow and by the open support received by Lukashenka in his illegitimate third bid for power in Belarus, Russia itself is far from being immune to this sickness.

Elections in Belarus and Ukraine: Key Differences

By Jan Maksymiuk

(The author has updated his February 15 Foreign Service Institute presentation by adding the ongoing developments in Belarus up to the start of early voting.)

The scheduling of a presidential election in Belarus for March 19, 2006 has awakened some hopes in the West that Belarus might become another post-Soviet country in which mass election protests -- a "color revolution" -- could bring about a regime change, as it happened during the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Some commentators have even designated a "color" name -- the Denim Revolution -- to such a potential popular revolt in Belarus.

In this context, it may be instructive to compare the pre-election political and socioeconomic situation in Ukraine in 2004 and that in Belarus in 2006, as these nations, apart from being neighbors and sharing a lot of common history, are also culturally and psychologically close to each other. Georgia's and Kyrgyzstan's revolutionary experience, because of the countries' geographical and cultural distance from Belarus, may not be so relevant for the Belarusian situation.

Even a cursory glance at Ukraine at the end of 2004 and Belarus in early 2006 reveals some evident and important dissimilarities in their respective election conditions.

First, the most obvious thing -- in Ukraine in 2004 President Leonid Kuchma was stepping down. The incumbent was not personally affected by the outcome of the ballot. Of course, Kuchma supported then Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych's presidential bid, but he promptly withdrew that support once opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko agreed to back a constitutional reform limiting presidential powers and apparently offered as yet undisclosed security guarantees to Kuchma for the post-election period.

On the other hand, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is running for a third consecutive time and is ostensibly greedy not only as the president, but also for an overwhelming electoral victory. He has repeatedly asserted that this election would devastate the opposition to such an extent that it would virtually cease to exist. And there is nothing that the Belarusian opposition could offer Lukashenka in exchange for his voluntary retirement. Lukashenka has Moscow's tacit moral backing and explicit economic support to his political longevity, and that is all what really counts for him.

Second, Kuchma's regime was much less repressive than Lukashenka's. On the whole, Yushchenko had coverage in the media, and the Ukrainian police in 2004 did not prevent opposition candidates from electioneering freely. Neither did the police prevent Yushchenko supporters from building a rostrum for political speeches and rock concerts on Independence Square and a tent camp on Khreshchatyk Boulevard in Kyiv, that became a sort of national headquarters for the Orange Revolution.

In Belarus, following two weeks of a relative calm in the election campaign, the police and security forces were ordered to arrest opposition campaign managers and activists at every opposition rally. Courts subsequently punished them with prison terms extending not only for the remainder of the campaign but also for few days beyond the election date. Lukashenka has clearly decided to exclude the most active campaigners from working for his opposition rivals, Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin, and to minimize the chance for post-election protests. Milinkevich has called on his supporters to rally on October Square in downtown Minsk after the closure of polling stations on March 19. But even the mere possibility of gathering in one place in Minsk may be denied to the opposition. Belarusian police rehearsed for such a scenario on 31 December 2005, when they cordoned off October Square and effectively prevented all people, many of whom were young people from opposition groups, from celebrating the New Year with bottles of champagne on the square at midnight. Some pessimists among the opposition even predict that police are able to, and will, block not only October Square but all other squares in downtown Minsk on the night of March 19, thus frustrating the opposition's plans to gather a large numbers of people in any one place.

For a revolution to happen, the loss of self-confidence by an authoritarian government is clearly not enough -- the nation also needs to have an undisputable leader who can articulate its need for change. Ukraine in 2004 had such a indisputable leader in the person of Yushchenko, who after his dismissal from the post of prime minister in April 2001 became not only the most popular and trusted figure in the opposition but also the most popular and trusted politician in the country in general, the position he retained until the presidential election in November 2004.

In Belarus the situation is much less auspicious for the opposition. Milinkevich as a relative newcomer to national politics is less popular than Lukashenka on a national scale, as testified by independent surveys held in the beginning of the campaign. While projected as a unity candidate of the democratic forces, Milinkevich nonetheless has a rival in Kazulin who is supported by at least one opposition party.

Communication with voters is one more problem that makes the current situation in Belarus drastically different from that in Ukraine in 2004. Despite heroic efforts to hold meetings with voters in both Minsk and the provinces, Milinkevich is visibly unable to make up for the complete blockade of information about him in the state-run media. Opposition-minded media -- that is, a few remaining independent newspapers -- do not help much, since the government kicked them out from state distribution networks and banished to printing houses in Russia. And even those print runs that manage somehow to leave the printing houses do not necessarily reach Belarus, as issues with materials deemed especially unfavorable to Lukashenka are confiscated by police at the border.

For a revolution to happen, an authoritarian government also must be unpopular at least among 50 percent of the electorate, as was the case in Ukraine in 2004. This, how-

ever, is not the case of Belarus. Since there is no meaningful free media in the country, most Belarusians get their information exclusively from the government propaganda machine and are poorly informed or even completely ignorant about the real state of affairs in the country. Independent pollsters routinely found in the past few years that the majority of Belarusians believed that their economy performed well, and that the political situation in the country was stable and satisfactory.

Barring some drastic mistakes that the authorities may make on election day and when handling possible opposition protests after the ballot, nothing seems to endanger another "elegant" election victory for Lukashenka, who has asserted on several occasions that his backing on March 19 will be no lower than 75 percent. As during previous elections in Belarus, the opposition will find it very hard to verify the officially announced results, since it has no representatives on territorial election commissions and the ballots are soon destroyed, as was the practice in the past elections.

However, short of taking power, the opposition will nonetheless pass its election test if it does not splinter shortly after the March 19 ballot.

QUOTES of QUARTER

The Belarusian government demonstrated "flagrant and total disregard for the democratic process and OSCE values" during the recent presidential campaign in the country,

said the US ambassador to the OSCE **JULIE FINLEY**, at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on March 30.

"No legitimate interest is served when oil and gas become tools of intimidation or blackmail,"

Vice President **DICK CHENEY** in a speech to European leaders in Vilnius on May 4.

"Gazprom's goals are obvious. It seeks to take control of the gas transport systems in Europe as well as in Belarus"

Belarusian First Deputy Prime Minister **ULADZIMIR SIAMASHKA**, as quoted on May 17 by Interfax.

"Any foot-dragging in solving the question of gas costs and gas transportation systems is not for the benefit of Belarus and of the integration process."

Russian Prime Minister **MIKHAIL FRADKOV** at a press conference in Minsk on May 19.

"I have watched with admiration as many of you have braved the cold and snow and the fear of intimidation and arrest in your peaceful call for democracy," former US Secretary of State **MADELEINE ALBRIGHT**, addressing citizens of Belarus protesting the fraudulent elections.

BELARUS' FORUM

A Letter from the Prison Cell in Europe's Last Dictatorship

By Andrey Dynko

Excerpts from an article in Prague weekly, RESPEKT, March 28, 2006. Andrey Dynko, the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper Nasha Niva was arrested as he got off a bus near October Square, in Minsk. He was bringing food to the demonstrators who spent a few days on the square protesting the fraudulent election results. Dynko was summarily sentenced to 10 days of detention. (Translated from Czech by George Stankevich)

I am writing these lines on Monday at 11:00 PM. With luck, they may reach the editorial office of *Nasha Niva* before the deadline. The lights are turned off, but the prison is not sleeping - it is buzzing like the jungle at night. Noise and laughter are heard from cells. It reminds one of a children's summer camp. During the day we play chess with bread figures, "mafias" and "warships", and solve crossword puzzles. Story-telling time begins after the evening tattoo. The prisoners endlessly recall various police actions and escorts, making fun of the dictator, his court lackeys, as well as, star broadcast commentators and policemen called in from all parts of the capital. "Quiet", "Damn it!" is heard from the guards, but the noise does not abate. In the little window above the door there is a light bulb, under which light I am writing.

Long live Belarus

An hour ago the supervisor told the boys in the neighboring cell, that an additional three hundred detainees are being brought here to the Okrestin street prison. It sounds crazy and difficult to believe. Who can think up such jokes after a week of endless arrests? We received the last large supply of detainees on Saturday. At that time, a rumor that a procession of fifteen thousand demonstrators was heading for our Okrestin prison spread throughout the cells; two hours later it was confirmed by the minister of interior in an evening news broadcast. The prison greeted his words by chanting "Long live Belarus", these words accompanied by drumming on radiators, now barely lukewarm, (during the day the radiators are turned off completely).

We are sitting in the new prison building. It is already packed to the ceiling with people detained during the demonstrations on Minsk's main square and surrounding vicinity. There are eight of us in a cell designed for five; thus we attempt to estimate the total number of interned by using the proportional method. We don't know the number of cells in the old building - the new one has about forty. How many are there? On the list of meals issued we signed our names under the numbers 327, 329.... Therefore, we estimate that there are five hundred, possibly six hundred detainees? The Belarusian radio, our only accessible information medium, does not mention the number of detainees - a clear sign that it's huge.

Pornographic magazines and drugs

Two prison buildings are completely full. The cells are fermenting with life. Honest citizens are getting accustomed to prison. New prisoners tell us about the mass protests on March 25th, Independence Day. The arriving prisoners chanting "Shame!", and "Long live Belarus", in front of the prison gates are rewarded with thunderous applause by the prison inmates. The youngsters in our cell speculate on the best solidarity action they can suggest to their colleagues at work: for instance, they should eat only twice a day like the prisoners, until the last detainee is freed. Valery Bulhakau lets us know in his column in *Nasha Niva*, "Be prepared for anything, but don't give up!"

We are proud to receive packages from the outside. It delights us that they are also sent to those of us who came from the provinces. Similarly, during the court proceedings we were gladdened by the presence of lawyers and human right defenders. They were powerless to change the verdicts, but were present on our behalf, nonetheless.

The prison brings us together. We are many, and we notice that our optimistic strength is affecting the guards too. The novice guards look us over and enter into conversations with us. Through peep-holes some even show us two fingers raised into a "V," representing our victory. "Why are you guys so sad?" jokes one guard, "The girls in the next cell have drugs and porno magazines." (Shortly after the destruction of the tent camp Belarusian TV showed close-ups from one of the demonstrators' tents, allegedly containing a deluge of hypodermic needles and pornographic magazines.). We roll with laughter.

My dear Fatherland

The radio announces that France is experiencing a social crisis, and in Ireland, 1200 people lost their jobs due to a mass bankruptcy of restaurants. However, it is impossible not to notice that Lukashenka, the "guarantor of our socio-economic stability," has been silent for the last week. The Oranges' victory in Ukraine is evident from the way Belarusian radio has been reporting all Monday on the commotion in a number of Ukrainian electoral districts - the people feel that they contributed to the Orange victory. Fortunately for the Ukrainians, they anticipated, in time, what some are capable of doing in order to keep friends in power. Unfortunately, those in power succeeded once more in Belarus. Alternatively, we hear, (for the ninth time), the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' bitter condemnation of the U.S. and EU's interference in Belarus' internal affairs; we know that they are requesting our release. This is an indication that the success of those in power is not complete - our people have spoiled the regime's "elegant victory." This is why Lukashenka keeps silent.

Until March, I had the feeling that the Republic of Lies (in Belarusian *Republika Brachni*, abbreviated *RB*, like *Republic Belarus*) would survive its creator. While in prison, it dawned on me that it may all end much sooner. I underestimated the power of the moral motor driving those who are protesting, and expanding the civic foundations of the protests. In contrast with the 1996 and 2002 protests, those who came out to the square in the spring of 2006 knew what they were getting into.

Who are my fellow prisoners? Mostly people imprisoned for the first time; eighteen to thirty-five years of age. A programmer from Minsk; a disc jockey from Mahilou; a merchant from the flea-market in Dynamo stadium (an ethnic Russian, a soldier's son, who came to Belarus at the age of 17) - a living denial of dull nationalistic stereotypes. Then there is a businessman in an expensive suit, who doubles as an Evangelical church minister; a worker from Homiel, who is also a musician; a reporter for the newspaper *Belarusians and Market*, Vadzim Aleksandrovich. In addition, there is a technician from Minsk with experience in leading the opposition organization the Young Front, who, after his regular work, translates American animated films into Belarusian.

Prison inmates

The cells in Okrestin are living their own tempestuous lives. The preachers sermonize about the trials God set on Joseph, dissidents with twenty years' experience tell others about past revolts, (the younger ones don't know anything about the protests of 1996). Members of Zubr, (an oppositional youth group), represent our true elite. I realized it here in prison, when I saw them up close and could appreciate their knowledge and skills. No sense of dejection, no fear. Instead, a feeling of fulfilled duty. "If not us, then who?" says a Horadnia manager, who, on March 21st at 6 a.m., loaded the trunk of his car with ham, cheese, mandarin oranges, and headed for Minsk. He reached the square, where he was captured.

... One article in the last issue of *Nasha Nica* was entitled "The first day of revolution." Yet there was no revolution, just protests. The protests seemed to have a moral, rather than a political character. If there is at least one sober person in the government, he could not help but notice that two out of three cars passing the square honked as a sign of solidarity with the demonstrators. After March 21st, traffic officers were supposedly transmitting the license plate numbers of such honking cars to patrols, who fined the motorists two blocks away - they imposed no fines on the square itself, where a "democratic facade" was being played out.

The blown-up structures

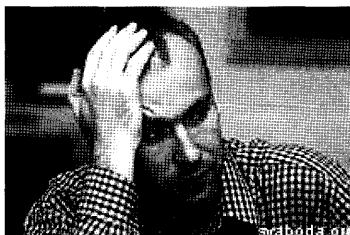
The Soviet Union used to prepare for war with an external enemy, investing millions in complicated rocketry. Lukashenka's power invests all its resources into a fight with a domestic enemy. This has led to the proliferation of armed units like SOBR, Almaz, PMSP - special units of Presidential Protection, and, the KGB. Heading all of the units is the National Security Council, with the president's son, Viktor Lukashenka, in charge of the Council. In comparison with the Soviet era, the interior military units have grown in a manifold manner. It seems that every one of these divisions was deployed in the vicinity of the square during the protest. Judging from information provided by personal contacts, the regime will be able to rely on elite fighters from these special units as long as there is money

available to pay them. The elite units are trained in the spirit of absolute loyalty to a commander's order, the law is for them of secondary importance. These fighters see no problem in knowingly producing false accusations of the type stating, "attack on a public servant" etc.

In our contemporary, repressive system, the political party structure has been replaced by the "ideological vertical." It coordinates the work of indoctrination with subsequent checks on people's behavior. The vertical is closely coupled with the secret service apparatus; it cooperates in organizing or falsifying pseudo-electoral procedures. All this is accompanied by the noise of government-controlled information media. Protests are stifled by force, preventively, if possible - while the courts, electoral commissions etc. simply confirm the verdicts adopted "above." Relatively favorable economic conditions provide the system's participants with faith in its longevity, and what is more important - in its correctness. It seems that Lukashenka's system will, like its Soviet predecessor, generate unlimited spiritual corruption and propagandistic idiotism. Yet, first it creates the absolute devotion of those who derive material benefits and ideological satisfaction from the system.

The mysterious visitors

We, the inmates of cell # 13, were able to observe the devotion to Lukashenka's system in one person, who visited us on the night of Friday, March 24th, when the police disassembled the tent camp on the square and arrested its inhabitants. We didn't quite understand who he was, or the purpose of his visit. Two civilians, accompanied by high prison officials, came to our cell. One of the "civilians" was a blond man in a mink hat, with the piercing immobile look of an SS-man. He wanted to know where we work. The men had decided to visit the cells to see



Andrey Dynko

"what kind of people staged these disorders." - "What are you missing? - Do you get paid enough?" they asked the programmer.

The visitors wilted as soon as Vadzim Aleksandrovich began to argue with them in Belarusian. "What language is he speaking?" asked the Russian "colleague" of the prison supervisor. "Belarusian," was the reply. After the two departed, we speculated about who they might have been. According to the guard, one was a "deputy minister." However he did not appear to be such, judging from his speech and behavior. The riddle was solved by the magazine, *Our Sport*, delivered to our cell in a package. The man is pictured in a photograph taken during the Belarus - Spain tennis match, sitting between Lukashenka, Prime Minister Sidorski and Minsk Mayor Paulau. Yes - it was him! Lusnika, the chief of the president's personal protection guard. And what was his colleague's role - Russian secret police? Does that mean, perhaps, that Russian advisors were present in Minsk during the days of March 19-25? What was the significance of this visit? Possibly simply a wish to see the "war prisoners" with their own eyes. Did they de-

sire to determine, "Who are these people? who dared to throw down the gauntlet to the empire?"

Cure by self-sacrifice

Lukashenka's regime undertook the next step away from normality. The atmosphere of terror unleashed before the elections and mass arrests after the March protests contributed to this atmosphere. The administration wanted to choke the tent camp by a blockade, to let it fall due to fatigue. The very essence of the regime was manifested in the act of arresting girls bringing thermos bottles of tea to demonstrators, as well as in the fact of police vans hiding behind billboards, "For flourishing Belarus." Security units detained anyone they considered a possible organizer of protests. However, the unexpected happened: every detained person was replaced by three new ones; people smuggled food to the tents by hiding it under their clothing. Photographers immortalized the happy face of boy who unzipped his sports jacket to reveal a string of sausages wrapped around his body.

The existence of the tent camp induced thousands of people to perform heroic deeds, small and large. The memory of these deeds will remain with people for years and brighten their hearts. A cure by self-sacrifice - that was the sense of the protests of the spring of 2006. Those in power grasped that they lost.

The regime clumsily destroyed the tent camp, (the tactic proved ineffective). This is why on Independence Day, (March 25), the government resorted to very primitive provocation - imprisoning protesters. This is how I see the image of those days, most of which I spent in prison. Correct me, if I am wrong.

Alyaksandr Milinkevich proclaimed that after March 19 a different Belarus will wake up: courageous and free. I am not certain whether it wasn't just a propaganda challenge. I don't really know what is happening outside the prison walls. I don't even know who is still at large now. I am spending these ten days in the company of people who underwent a cure by self-sacrifice. These are bright days spent with bright people. Perhaps Milinkevich was not mistaken after all.

Andrey Dynko is the Editor-in-Chief of the independent Belarusian weekly Nasha Niva.

Skaryna's Bible Found in Germany

A copy of the original Belarusian Bible, published and printed by Francishak Skaryna in Prague in years 1517-1519, was found in the German town of Görlitz, in the library of the Upper Lusatian Scholarly Society. The rare book, one of the world's first printed bibles, has been bought by Lusatian Sorbs in 1527.

On the occasion of this discovery the Belarusian State University in cooperation with the Association of German-Belarusian Meetings, staged in October 2005 in Miensk a special press conference, attended also by professor Norbert Randau, German Foreign Ministry's consultant on linguistics.

Editor's note: Lusatian Sorbs, speaking a Slavic language, akin to Polish and Czech, live in the eastern part of the present German state of Saxony.

SMS on Trial: The Internet Under Repair

After the March and Chernobyl Day demonstrations, it seems that Belarus has once again become a typical quiet state. One should not expect any big street protests in the next couple of months, since it is now the traditional "dacha" (summer house) period and summer vacations in Belarus tend to be really long. Belarus is still the focus of international attention and is mentioned in the leading media more or less regularly, but now it comes up mostly in connection with the upcoming G-8 Summit rather than generating news on its own. Belarusian authorities have also returned to the old tactics of quiet repression by firing and arresting activists here and there instead of detaining hundreds of people at a time. But despite this apparent lull, the struggle continues and sometimes assumes very strange forms.

Several unusual trials—even for Belarus—took place last week in one of Miensk's courts. We have become used to the fact that prominent academics and journalists are being sentenced to 15 days in prison for swearing or hooliganism, but last week a student was actually tried for sending a text message to another student. The student on trial was one of those young people who suffered from the cold on Kastyrychnickaya Square in March. The recipient was a third-year student of the Journalism Department of Belarusian State University and an intern at Belarusian First State TV Channel. The first was protesting for freedom with 500 peers; the latter came up with the brilliant idea of putting empty vodka bottles, porn magazines, and drug syringes in and around the tents for the state TV cameras to document after the tent city defenders were taken into custody by the riot police. It is hard to say whether Denis Balshakou (and his name ought to be added to the EU and US travel ban lists) came up with this idea himself or whether somebody else from certain agencies put it into his head, but he was the one who proudly reported about his achievement while blaming the Western media for inciting an information war at a student conference, held at the Journalism Department shortly after the elections.

But instead of applause and recognition, Denis started to receive the following text messages: "Good job, Deniska! You created a great plot about porn and drugs. Your peers from Akrescina (the prison where most of the arrested where detained) will never forget you." Although Denis' phone number was available on the Internet, the senders of the messages have been quickly contacted by the police. A police officer who contacted Alesia (the girl on trial) first suggested they should meet somewhere outside of the police station. She refused. A couple of days later she received an official summons—Denis wanted his "honor and dignity" be protected in the court. He was so sure of himself, the people standing behind him, and the regime he was supporting, that he even didn't bother to come to court on the trial's first day. He showed up the next day, without a lawyer and... lost the case. Alesia was acquitted because the judge couldn't find any unlawful activity.

Is such a verdict surprising? Yes and no. Yes, because in the course of the last several months people have been found guilty of the most absurd charges. No, because the Belarusian authorities pretend for some reason that their parody of a legal system still exists in the country, lack creativity, and do not yet know how to adjust laws written in the pre-Internet and pre-smss era, to the regime's needs in the 21st century. But they are learning. Recently, the authorities have begun checking all commercial Internet sites registered in Belarus, some of which sell, among other items, "uncensored" literature and music. So, many of these shopping sites are now temporarily "under repair." Many link this measure with the new Law on Media, which is expected to be introduced in the "Palatka" (Belarus' version of a parliament which has no real power and is packed with "representatives" hand-picked by Lukashenka) very soon. Since it is almost impossible to further tighten control over the traditional media any more, the Internet will be the main target for new regulations. But earlier this year, students have already been banned from accessing certain websites in universities' computer labs and computer intranet networks in dorms were forbidden. The authorities are also working on another new law, which will equate flash mobs with illegal mass gatherings and therefore allow them to fine or detain participants for up to 15 days.

Well, laws and regulations can be altered, but I remain a firm believer that this regime will be unable to catch up to the quickness and creativity of free minds. In the past, it was the democratic opposition that responded to Lukashenka's tactics; today, it is the regime which is reacting, trying to find new methods of repression and to guess what will be the next "threat." No longer proactive, it has become reactive. The regime has lost its confidence and its grip. It is shaky.

Iryna

Source: Transitions Online - Belarus Country Blog .
May 22nd, 2006.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Belarus will become the most important question at the G-8 summit".

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI, political scientist and statesman, former United States Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter, in an interview with *Vremya Novostei* (Russia), April 28, 2006.

"Today's Belarus is not only a problem of the Poles, but it's a problem of the whole of Europe."

BOGDAN BORUSEWICZ, the Speaker of the Polish Senate, in an interview for "Wider Europe," May 25, 2006.

"Belarusians have realized their identity and do not want to join Russia"

SERGEI STEPASHIN, the head of Russia's Chamber of Accounts in an interview with *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 5, 2006.

ECONOMY

Belarus Seeks to Emulate German-Gazprom Deals

By Vladimir Socor

President Alexander Lukashenka's government in Belarus is drawing inspiration from German companies' emergent model of relations with Russia's Gazprom, a model blessed by the German government as well and antithetical to market economics.

On May 17, top officials of the Belarus government and the state pipeline company Beltransgas called for replicating the German model in the Belarus-Russia gas relations. The Minsk officials propose to hand over 50% ownership in Beltransgas to Gazprom, in return for a 25% stake to be acquired by Belarus in an unspecified Siberian gas field that would yield 12 billion cubic meters of gas annually to Belarus. The officials extensively cited the long-term agreements recently signed by Germany's BASF/Wintershall and Gazprom to show that Minsk's proposal follows that model. Under those agreements, Wintershall acquires a 25% stake in a Siberian gas field while Gazprom acquires a 50% stake in the joint Wintershall-Gazprom company Wingas for distribution in Germany and Europe.

Germany's E.ON Ruhrgas is close to signing a parallel agreement with Gazprom on those same terms. Both German agreements and that now proposed by Belarus adhere to Gazprom's concept of long-term use of a "single export channel." The Yamal-Europe pipeline is the "single channel" for Belarus. In Germany's case, that single channel is the North European Gas Pipeline on the Baltic seabed, to be built by Gazprom, Wintershall, and Ruhrgas in a 50-25-25 joint venture, synchronized with shared control of German and other European distribution systems.

Belarusian First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka remarked, "Gazprom's goals are obvious. It seeks to take control of the gas transport systems in Europe as well as in Belarus" (Interfax, May 17). Minsk's sober comment (even as it offers to give in) contrasts with the German businessmen's and cabinet ministers' euphoria, on display at the signing of their agreements with Gazprom (see EDM, September 13, 2005, May 2, 2006).

This model reflects the German gas market's intense de facto cartel-ization by a few big transport and distribution companies and the outright state monopoly in Belarus. Each side is ready (albeit for different reasons) to share its internal market with Gazprom in return for relative restraint on price hikes, and both are content to lock their respective country into long-term dependence on Russian deliveries. Indeed, such arrangements with Gazprom are shielding those companies from market competition in Germany and help preserve state ownership of the economy in Belarus.

Syamashka and the Beltransgas executives were addressing an industry conference on Minsk's response to Gazprom's threat to more than triple the price of gas next year at one stroke. The move aims to force Minsk to cede

control of Beltransgas to Gazprom in return for continuing preferential treatment of Belarus on gas prices. In early April, Gazprom had given Belarus until April 30 to respond. On April 28, Lukashenka rushed to St. Petersburg for a meeting with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, and proposed ceding to Gazprom a stake in Beltransgas in return for sharing access with Belarus to a Siberian gas field (Belarus Television, April 28; Interfax, May 6). Media reports on this initiative were sketchy and did not mention the German model, although the latest set of Russian-German gas agreements signed at the Russian-German summit on April 26 almost certainly inspired Lukashenka's demarche two days later to Putin.

For further measures to limit or offset Gazprom's price hikes, Minsk proposes joint construction of underground storage sites in Belarus for Russian gas en route to European Union countries and starting immediately the construction of the Yamal-Europe pipeline's second trunk line in Belarus. Gazprom, experiencing a serious deficit of storage capacity close to EU territory, can readily agree to Minsk's storage proposal. However, Gazprom rejects outright Minsk's proposal to proceed with Yamal-Europe's second trunk line at this time or even in the next several years.

Gazprom plans to complete at least the first stage of the North European pipeline on the Baltic seabed, and probably also its second stage, while holding up the Yamal-Europe pipeline's second trunk line via Belarus and Poland. The sequencing reflects, on the one hand, Gazprom's shortage of investment capital commensurate to its ambitions. However, it also aims to: a) withhold at least for the next several years any additional volumes of gas pumped via "unfriendly" Poland; and b) press Belarus to cede control of Beltransgas by threatening to switch some of the gas transit business from Beltransgas to the North European pipeline.

The annual transit capacities involved are up to 27.5 billion planned for either line of the Baltic pipeline and up to 33 billion cubic meters for either trunk line of Yamal-Europe via Belarus and Poland (the first line becomes fully operational this year). In addition, Beltransgas handles more than 20 billion cubic meters of Russian gas annually en route to EU territory.

Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupryanov and Russia's Ambassador in Belarus, Alexander Surikov, recently warned publicly that Beltransgas risks losing business to the Baltic seabed pipeline, unless Minsk cedes control over Beltransgas to Gazprom. Kupryanov, moreover, spells out that Russia needs "full flexibility" in terms of multiple export routes to Europe: via the Baltic seabed, via Belarus-Poland, and via Ukraine. (Gazprom additionally seeks a Turkish route to preempt other suppliers to Europe). As the total planned capacity of these pipelines considerably exceeds Russia's gas export capacity (even if Turkmen gas is factored in), Gazprom will be able to play off the transit countries against each other regarding transit terms and will press for taking over the national transit systems.

Belarus currently pays a mere \$46.68 per one thousand cubic meters of Russian gas, while Gazprom pays almost

equally ridiculous fees for the transit of its gas via Belarus to points west: \$0.75 per one thousand cubic meters per one hundred kilometers through Beltransgas pipelines, and \$0.46 through the Belarus stretch of the Yamal-Europe pipeline. Gazprom is to deliver 21 billion cubic meters of gas to Belarus this year, amply covering (as in previous years) the country's requirements. In 2005, Gazprom exported 41 billion cubic meters of gas via Belarus, including 22 billion through the Yamal-Europe line before it reached full capacity and another 19 billion cubic meters through Beltransgas pipelines. Gazprom threatens to raise the price of gas to Belarus to at least \$145 per one thousand cubic meters as of January 1, 2007, but would show clemency in return for a 50% stake in the Beltransgas system. (Interfax, May 2, 13, 16, 17

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 19, 2006.

HISTORICAL DATES

June 14, 1900

Birthdate of **Michas Zabejda-Sumicki**, a famous Belarusian opera singer. Lived and performed in Kharbin (China), Milan, Warsaw, Prague.

July 7, 1882

Janka Kupala (Ivan Lucevic), a great Belarusian poet, was born in Viazynka, near the town of Maladecna.

Kupala may be considered one of the founders of the modern Belarusian literature, whose patriotic poetry significantly contributed to Belarus' national awakening in the 20th century.

In addition to his literary activities, he was a valuable civic leader and the editor of the *Nasha Niva* newspaper in the 1910s.

He died tragically in Moscow in 1942.

July 7, 1887

Mark Chagall, one of the most significant painters and graphic artists of the 20th century, was born in Viciebsk. Between 1915 and 1917 he lived in St. Petersburg, Russia; after the Russian Revolution he was the director of the Art Academy in Viciebsk from 1918 to 1919, and the art director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater from 1919 to 1922. In 1923 he moved to France, where he spent the rest of his life.

July 10, 1942

Piotra Klimuk, the first Belarusian-born cosmonaut, was born in the Bierascie (Brest) region. He became the commander of three Soviet orbital flights: in 1973, 1975 and 1978

July 15, 1410

Anniversary of the **Battle of Grunwald**, one of the biggest in the Middle Ages. The German Teutonic Knights, with West European mercenaries, were then decisively defeated by an army commanded by the Polish king Jahajla (Jagiello) and Litva's Grand Duke Vitaut, supported by Czech Hussite and vassal Tartar contingents.

CHERNOBYL LEGACY

Political Confrontation Detracts From Acute Chernobyl Problems in Belarus

By David Marples

Belarus prepares for grim Chernobyl anniversary

As the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl approaches in Belarus, and the opposition forces plan a final protest march on April 26 in the aftermath of the presidential elections, there is no sign that the country has come close to overcoming the profound health, social, and environmental problems caused by the 1986 nuclear accident.

The issue has been clouded by two factors. First, there is the politicization of the Chernobyl event as a symbol of the confrontation between the president and the opposition, particularly the united democratic forces behind candidate Alexander Milinkevich. Second, there has been a rather unseemly international dispute as to the health effects of Chernobyl, and particularly the long-term mortality rates from radiation-induced cancers.

President Alexander Lukashenka marked the last two anniversaries with visits to the Chernobyl zone, which were marked with intensive TV publicity and the overall message that if the area was dangerous, then the president of the country would not be visiting there. Though parts of the zone -- especially Homel region -- have been depopulated, students and migrants are being used to cultivate land that remains contaminated with radio-nuclides, particularly Cesium-137 and Strontium-90. Lukashenka has detained several scientists whose findings contradict the official position that the accident in Belarus has been largely overcome, and using the forces of the government without outside assistance.

The government of Belarus did not agree with some of the findings of the Chernobyl Forum Report, issued in September 2005. That report, the most comprehensive to date, demonstrated the enormous health and psychological impact of the accident in Belarus. About 90% of the republic was irradiated with short-lived radio-nuclides, deposited by the "radiation cloud" that was formed after the two steam explosions at the fourth reactor unit of the Chernobyl nuclear plant in the early morning of April 26, 1986. The reaction of the republican authorities was delayed by the lack of information about what had happened from both the Soviet authorities in Moscow and the Ukrainian party leadership in Kyiv.

The radioactive iodine (Iodine-131 with a half-life of eight days) was to take a serious toll and has resulted in some 4,000 cases of thyroid cancer to date, almost a quarter of them in young children, and in most instances contracted after 1989. Long-term effects are equally serious. Over the 17-year period 1986-2003, surgery had been carried out on

almost 2,000 young adults and children, and 19 have died as a result of the progression of the tumors. About 23% of Belarus was contaminated with Cesium and Strontium, and about 2% of the territory affected with Plutonium radio-nuclides (half-life 24,000 years). Many of the affected regions did not take any preventive action until 1989, when it was revealed officially that they formed part of the contaminated zone. Belarus lost a quarter of its valuable forests.

Today about 1.5 million residents of Belarus are provided with medical assistance as a result of the 1986 disaster. Among those Belarusians who took part in the cleanup operations -- they are referred to today as "liquidators," a term reminiscent of the Stalin era -- there were registered more than 2,800 first-time cases of cancer, and in 73% of these incidences it occurred among those working in the zone in 1986-88. Over 300,000 children continue to reside in the most affected regions of Homel and Mahileu. They suffer from a rise in frequency of sicknesses of all types, but particularly respiratory diseases, digestive problems, and childhood diabetes. Among the age group 10-14, for example, newly formed cancers in the Chernobyl zones exceed those in the "clean" region of Vitsebsk by 1.5 times, and the incidence of endocrinal pathology is double the average in clean areas.

This disturbing picture has been partly concealed by an international dispute over the "true" health effects of Chernobyl, and the number of long-term mortalities. Two

Over 300,000 children continue to reside in the most affected regions...

reports are now extant: the Chernobyl Forum Report (CFR) and the Greenpeace Report. The latter raises the number of long-term victims to over 90,000, and reports some

34,000 deaths to date among liquidators. However, the dispute is largely contrived. It derives from the unfortunate and misleading press releases issued by representatives of the Chernobyl Forum, which do not reflect accurately the contents of the CFR. The issue of 4,000 long-term deaths is even belied by the CFR itself, which includes a table indicating some 9,000 long-term deaths.

Even that figure pertains only to a small fraction of the lands contaminated by Chernobyl, namely the republics of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Neither report really disputes that the Chernobyl-linked cancer deaths will be in the tens of thousands. The Belarusian government, which is listed as one of the authors of the CFR, would have been content with the misleading press release (less than 60 current casualties and under 4,000 long-term), but not with the figures within or in the heated Greenpeace Report, comprised mainly from the research of Ukrainian scientists.

For the 1.5 million individuals still requiring medical attention from the disaster, such arguments are largely irrelevant. Most of them have lived off contaminated land for the past 20 years, their benefits now reduced, and their concerns dismissed as "psychological stress" and "dependency." The impact of Chernobyl has not dissipated after two decades.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, April 25, 2006

Thoughts and Observations

Revolution of the Spirit

By Vitali Silitski

With Minsk's central square cleared of protesters, the prospects for democracy look bleak in Belarus. But that's not necessarily the case.

There was no Orange-style revolution in Belarus following the 19 March presidential elections. But there may have been the beginning of a revolution of the spirit that will bring the last tyranny in Europe to an end. Observers should not lament the "failure" of revolution but should hail the beginning of a genuine democratic movement, which is stronger today than it was just a few years ago.

From the beginning of this campaign, there was little sign of a real contest. Lukashenka could have won a free and fair election: Strong economic growth and social stability might have guaranteed him half of the vote or so, had the vote actually been counted. But a free and fair vote carried the risk of defeat, however remote, and the ghost of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 fueled hysteria within the regime. Consequently, just before the vote, the government criminalized opposition-related activity and began to arrest election monitors and activists from non-governmental organizations on charges of terrorism.

Yet Lukashenka wanted some legitimacy for his reelection and therefore allowed opposition candidates to participate. Surprisingly, two challengers, the leader of the united opposition, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, and the former rector of the Belarusian State University, Alyaksandr Kazulin, refused to bow to the dictator and decided to play by their own rules. Their 30-minute campaign speeches on state TV (that is how much exposure to alternative opinions an ordinary TV viewer in Belarus has had in five years) were devoted not much to the issues but to attacking Lukashenka's character – an act previously unthinkable in a country where one official once declared Lukashenka to be "a bit higher than God." Both candidates emphasized freedom and democracy rather than day-to-day issues in their messages and found much sympathy, to the surprise of observers. Thousands turned out on the streets to hear speeches from opposition candidates, numbers that were unthinkable even in Minsk just a year ago.

Lukashenka saw the crowds as well and got nervous. Kazulin, whose particularly scathing attacks made him an instant celebrity, was beaten up by riot police. Dozens of observers and reporters were denied visas, expelled, or even arrested and charged with helping to plot a coup. State TV propped up its propaganda, and the KGB began to discover one plot after another every several days. In the last revelation, the head of the KGB claimed that the opposition would poison the tap water in Minsk using decomposing rats. And dozens of opposition activists with experience in

street protests were rounded up in the run-up to the vote. Yet even in the face of these repressive tactics, Lukashenka's autocratic regime failed to deter people from mobilizing on the streets after the vote to denounce the fraudulent results.

On 19 March, at least 20,000 people took to the streets to protest the announcement of a "smashing" victory for Lukashenka, who was declared winner with 83 percent of the vote cast. And the protesters did not stop there, organizing an around-the-clock vigil on the central square of Minsk to demand annulment of the vote and new elections.

To be sure, the size of the protests was nowhere near the crowds that turned out in the streets in Kyiv a year and half ago. Yet thousands of Belarusians braved not only the blizzard but explicit threats of jail and even the death penalty made by the KGB on the eve of elections. Most of them faced immediate dismissal from state jobs or university if found in the crowd or even caught checking an opposition website. And they barely had means to communicate with each other due to suspension of most of the opposition press and an almost total blockade of the Internet and mobile communications. Could one have expected a protest of more than just a handful of dissidents in these, almost Soviet-style conditions?

SMALL VICTORIES

In retrospect, one has to admit that the protest was doomed. The opposition knew it did not win the elections and hence did not attempt to stage a revolution as such: that is, to attempt to snatch power from Lukashenka by

force. Instead, the protest turned into a show of defiance, an attempt to get the sympathy and attention of fellow countrymen. Day after day, the numbers dwindled, not least because each new day brought the protesters closer to an imminent show of

force by the government. It came on the morning of 23 March, when people on the square were surrounded and thrown into police trucks, then taken to jails and sentenced to various prison terms.

The dramatic end of the protest also highlighted an unpleasant fact for the Belarusian opposition: A combination of fear imposed by the government on one part society, and acceptance of the regime by another part, still limits its appeal and following. The streets of Minsk these days were full of pictures of solidarity and defiance, but also of indifference from passers-by and loathing for the protesters from the regime's supporters.

Lukashenka's opponents still have a long way to go to communicate their message to the entire society – and will have to do so in an even more repressive political climate than they have endured so far. But failures and disappointments shall not distract attention from the opposition's successes in this campaign and afterward. It achieved unity and presented society with a leader whom many accepted as a credible alternative to Lukashenka. It invigorated the network of democratic activists, who braved certain repression and imprisonment. It spurred public debate, and the

The March events may be the beginning of a newly invigorated fight for democracy...

quest for free information was boosted even when the regime knocked out independent newspapers by the dozens. And it proved to the society and the entire world that support for democratic change in Belarus is not limited to just a handful of fanatics.

The March events may be the beginning of a newly invigorated fight for democracy in Belarus as much as it can trigger a new, more severe round of oppression from the regime. The West cannot stop paying attention. Those struggling for democracy, especially those already in jail, deserve our solidarity; families of political prisoners need support; and recently expanded democratic assistance programs, especially efforts to expand access to independent media within Belarus, must be sustained, not cut, now that the election is over.

Democrats in Belarus defied expectations and demonstrated that they exist, they have some popular support, and they are willing to take risks in their fight for freedom. Now, more than ever, supporters of freedom in the West need to stand with them.

Source: Transition s On Line (TOL), 27 March 2006

Vitali Silitski, a longtime contributor to TOL from Belarus, is a visiting scholar at the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at Stanford University.

Election Season Ends, But Press Crackdown Continues

The period leading up to the Belarusian presidential election in March saw a full-scale crackdown on the country's independent press. Newspapers were stripped of their publication and distribution rights; journalists and editors were harassed. For Belarusians looking for news about the political opposition, the result was an information blackout. But even incumbent Alyaksandr Lukashenka's colossal win -- with more than 80 percent of the vote -- was not enough to relax the government's assault on the press. *Nasha Niva*, Belarus's oldest nonstate newspaper, is now facing closure.

Nasha Niva, which first appeared 100 years ago in Lithuania, began its anniversary year with trouble on the horizon. First, the weekly paper was dropped from state subscription catalogues. It's a common tactic by the Belarusian authorities -- one which effectively blocks a paper's access to distribution. Now authorities are threatening to close the paper's offices in Minsk.

Andrey Dynko, the editor in chief of *Nasha Niva*, tells RFE/RL's Belarus Service he has appealed to the Lithuanian Embassy in Minsk to help secure United Nations protection for the historic Belarusian-language newspaper as a part of Belarus's cultural heritage. "We said that we're preparing an appeal to the Lithuanian president and prime minister with a request that they apply to the [UN cultural agency] UNESCO to include *Nasha Niva* on its Representative List of the Nonmaterial Cultural Heritage of Humanity," Dynko says. "We were met with understanding on the part of the Lithuanian diplomats, and they will help us with

this request." *Nasha Niva* last week received a letter from city officials saying the paper's presence in the Belarusian capital was no longer "appropriate."

The reason -- Dynko's 10-day "administrative arrest." The *Nasha Niva* editor was charged with using foul language after being detained near the street protests that followed Lukashenka's reelection to a third term in office. The Minsk government has refused to explain why Dynko's arrest necessitates the paper's expulsion from the city.

One group watching the situation carefully is the French-based press watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF). RSF has accused the Belarusian government of "very serious" attacks on press freedom during the presidential election campaign and the days following the vote. RSF's news editor, Jean-Francois Julliard, criticized the move against *Nasha Niva* as just the latest in a series of bully tactics aimed at shutting down the nonstate press: "We condemn this decision, because it's a new way to threaten a newspaper, to stop its activities. It's a new way to shut down an independent voice. We are always concerned by the situation of press freedom in Belarus."

Many observers said the press crackdown ahead of the March presidential vote was aimed at ensuring an easy reelection for Lukashenka. But even with his third term in office secure, Lukashenka still appears determined to silence his few remaining public critics -- including *Nasha Niva*, which may have irked the government with its independent and pro-nationalist stance. Julliard says Lukashenka's reelection will make the situation even more difficult for independent journalists in Belarus: "The situation was very, very bad during and before the election. But the situation now means that President Lukashenka is completely intolerant to any criticism -- and not only during electoral campaign. I think he does not want to read any criticism in his newspapers in his country."

Nasha Niva, which was established in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius in November 1906, has always published in the Belarusian language. This is a deeply political distinction in a country where Russian is the language of the ruling elite. It was originally typeset in both Latin and Cyrillic lettering, to accommodate Belarusian Catholic and Orthodox communities, which used different scripts. The paper's description as a 100-year-old publication is somewhat misleading. *Nasha Niva* has been published for a total of just 24 years -- from 1906-1915 and from 1991-present. Still, its history as the country's first Belarusian newspaper has given it special status -- particularly among those hoping to preserve a distinct cultural identity in Belarus.

Journalist and political analyst Alyaksandr Fyaduta writes for *Nasha Niva*. He tells RFE/RL's Belarus Service that the paper is representative of the social changes beginning to appear in Belarus. *Nasha Niva* is not just a newspaper of that segment of society that speaks and thinks in Belarusian. *Nasha Niva* is the central newspaper of that segment of society that not only refuses to live in the corporate state that is being built [in Belarus] but also has a chance to live in a changed country," Fyaduta says. "What is taking place is actually an attempt at gagging the voice of the Belarusian youth, of those who were staying in the tent camp [on October Square] in Minsk."

For now, *Nasha Niva* will continue to publish in Belarus, using money from its supporters to maintain its website and continue its print distribution by any means possible. But if conditions become even more difficult, *Nasha Niva* may be forced to return to its original home, Vilnius, in order to continue printing.

Daisy Sindelar (RFE/RL's Belarus Service) contributed to this report.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, April 21, 2006

EU Imposes Visa Ban on Lukashenka, 30 Other Officials

By Ahto Lobjaks

EU foreign ministers on April 10 imposed a visa ban on 31 top Belarusian officials considered responsible for the conduct of the country's March 19 presidential poll, which the EU condemned as neither free nor fair. The number of those targeted by the EU falls short of what the Belarusian opposition and its more enthusiastic supporters within the EU had hoped for. However, EU officials made clear that new names can be added to the list and that further sanctions have not been ruled out.

The EU decision underscores the hope among the mainstream of the union's member states that it is possible simultaneously to get tough with the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- and still keep some lines of communication open.

Ursula Plassnik, foreign minister of the current EU chair Austria, announced the decision on April 11, confirming the EU had decided to limit itself to targeting only a few dozen Belarusian leaders. "Today, we have decided to impose a visa ban against members of the Belarus leadership responsible for violation of the international electoral standards during the presidential elections, and [those] responsible as well for the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition," Plassnik said.

The fact that the list of 31 officials is headed by Lukashenka represents the EU's intention to make it clear that its patience with the Belarusian regime has run out. Among the 31, there are three prominent members of the presidential administration, three ministers (but not the foreign minister), the head of the country's KGB, a number of judges, and the heads of regional electoral commissions.

However, it was clear there were divisions among the foreign ministers making the decision. Cyril Svoboda, the Czech foreign minister and one of the spokesmen within the EU for a tough line against Minsk, was visibly disappointed. He told journalists on the sidelines of the April 10 meeting that he was not "completely satisfied" with the list.

"We did agree all, we did agree on the measures we imposed today," Svoboda said. "But I'm repeating again that I

am not completely satisfied because the ban list is very short and in my view we need to put some other people on the ban list." In particular, Svoboda said the EU should target many prominent figures working for the state-run television and radio establishment.

Svoboda accuses them of "deforming democracy in Belarus," but the visa blacklist features only Alyaksandr Zimouski, head of the National State Television and Radio Company. Svoboda's sentiments also broadly reflect those of Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and some others. The length of the list was proposed last week by EU ambassadors in Brussels, and marked a victory for those EU states that advocated a more cautious approach regarding Belarus.

Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, who supported the April 10 decision, explained the reasoning behind it to RFE/RL. He said it sends a message while leaving the door open for future discussion. "[It reflects] possibly a certain conservativeness on the one hand and on the other a calculation that in order to change things in Belarus for the better, communication remains necessary," Paet said. "To impose a complete ban on movement would make it hard to take [the EU's] message equally well to governmental circles.

But the EU also says in an accompanying statement that the blacklist will be under constant review -- meaning it could be expanded. The statement also makes it plain that the EU's main concern currently lies with what it calls "political detainees" -- the many opposition activists and their supporters arrested in the course of the manifestations that followed the elections. The clear assumption is that the length of the visa-ban list depends on what the regime in Minsk will do next.

However, EU officials and diplomats admit privately that for a number of the bloc's member states, their reaction to events in Belarus is partly shaped by a wish not to complicate relations with Russia.

The limelight afforded to opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich is widely held to constitute an important litmus test of how far the European Union is willing to go in actively undermining Lukashenka's regime. Milinkevich was not invited to attend the foreign ministers' meeting on April 10 -- as he was in February. This was something Czech foreign minister Svoboda openly noted afterward. "Yesterday [April 9] Mr. Milinkevich, he called me and he said that he was slightly disappointed not to be present today in Luxembourg, because he wanted to sit at the very same table with us, and to discuss the situation in Belarus," Svoboda said. The foreign ministers also did not heed calls by the European Parliament to declare Lukashenka's presidential victory illegal and to demand new elections.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, April. 13, 2006

**EU also says...
that the blacklist will be
under constant review...**

Bialatski Considered for Nobel Peace Prize

The 43-year old Belarusian human rights defender Ales Bialatski has been nominated for the Nobel peace prize.

Belarusians have long dreamt about a Nobel prize in the field of literature, yet the first Belarusian Nobel award may be in the area of preserving peace.

This year Ales Bialatski won in Norway the Sakharov prize for his defense of human rights, and in the Czech Republic the prestigious prize "Homo Homini" (Man to Man) from the Czech ex-president Vaclav Havel.



Vaclav Havel with Ales Bialatski

Ales Bialatski created one of the most significant human rights defense organizations in Belarus - the Human Rights Center "Viasna" (Spring). He has been heading it until Belarus' justice ministry liquidated it recently.

His work in "Viasna" made him the central figure in the community of non-governmental organizations and in the opposition movement. The authorities sued him dozens of times.

However, this year the most probable candidate for the Nobel peace prize is Marti Ahtisaari, ex-premier of Finland, who is now heading the "Anti-crisis Initiative," a non-governmental organization, involved in mediating inter-state conflicts.

Source: *Nasha Niva*, May 19 -25, 2006.

Belarus: The Myth of "People Power"

By David Marples

On May 23 Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka delivered a "state of the nation address" that was broadcast live on Belarusian TV and lasted a relatively modest 51 minutes. The speech was significant for being his first major post-election broadcast, and it provided some rationale behind his personal mode of leadership while outlining his world view. The speech was a curious mixture: some ideas seemed to be expropriated from the presidential campaign of opposition candidates Alexander Milinkevich and Alexander Kazulin, whereas others were more familiar to television viewers.

Lukashenka began by focusing on what he termed "people power" and the resolution of the most important issues through popular participation in elections, referendums, and all-Belarusian assemblies. In what may have been a response to Western criticism, he claimed that civil society already exists in Belarus and is expressed through labor collectives, more than 2,000 public associations, 41 trade unions, and other organizations that provide for partnership and cooperation between these organs and the state. He intends to adhere to the contentious labor contracts and maintains that the Federation of Trade Unions should expose abuses in the labor relations system.

In contrast to other states -- none are cited but Russia may have been in mind -- Lukashenka has no plans to create a "party of power." Though he valued the role of the former Communist Party in the Soviet Union, he would not establish such a party from above; it could only be developed from the grassroots. In his view, there is no crisis in Belarus and therefore no reason for such a party to emerge at present. Belarusian society is based on four foundations, in his view: trade unions, councils of deputies, and youth and veterans' organizations. Some local councils, he stated, have "run to extremes," and the opposition is seeking "revenge" for its presidential electoral defeat by focusing on local elections. Thus there is work to be done by pro-government youth and veterans organizations with students and young people.

The concept of the "people" and popular support for his rule was repeated throughout his speech and is interpreted as confidence in officials, civil servants, and the president. However, Lukashenka was frank when it comes to his main problems, which are refined to two major issues: rising energy prices and constant threats of sanctions and other "preposterous measures" by the European Union and United States. He perceives a way out of this impasse by an aggressive "multidirectional policy" and support for a multi-polar world rather than one dominated by "barefaced diktat" -- a direct attack on the United States.

How is such a world to be constructed? First, Lukashenka perceives the emergence of new centers of power, and China is mentioned several times as a close friend of Belarus with a similar outlook. High energy prices have benefited Iran and allowed Russia to get back on its feet. India, Latin America, and other regions wish to become more independent in their policies.

As for Belarus, it intends to stand closely beside Russia and to deepen its relationship because "the benefits of unification are indisputable." It will also work within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States, though Lukashenka acknowledged the need for reform of this institution, and each state must take on more responsibility for its improvement. Belarus also wishes to expand significantly the role of the UN as an arbiter of international problems and to strengthen international security.

Overall the speech offered little of real vision for Lukashenka's third term. Elsewhere he has expressed his outrage at the travel ban on himself and 35 leading officials imposed by the EU and the United States, and he has encouraged parliament to respond to the refusal by Canada

and the United States to allow a Belarusian plane to refuel as it transported the Belarusian prime minister to Cuba. The problem for Lukashenka, however, is that he is in no position to forgo trade with the EU, especially in light of the recent Russian demands for tighter integration of Belarus through the structures of the Russia-Belarus Union.

Thus Lukashenka is assuring his own people and his foreign critics that his regime is based on popular enthusiasm and participation, a sort of dual power that masks the reality of a state run increasingly as a personal fiefdom. Such rhetoric has been deployed skillfully in the past, and it conveys the image that Lukashenka has rescued his state from economic privations and defended it from its enemies, while avoiding civil strife despite the machinations of the opposition. But many opposition supporters, particularly young people, are no longer deceived by what has been termed "symbolic rhetoric."

A balancing act will now have to be performed: to maintain close links and friendship with Russia without giving up enterprises, resources, and even sovereignty; overt hostility to the EU while working behind the scenes to reverse sanctions and to maintain existing levels of trade; friendship with Iran and China, but never definitively closing the door to warmer relations with the United States, particularly after the Bush administration ends its term in office. Lastly, and most significantly, Lukashenka is implicitly warning his public that hard times are on the way. The much-touted "Belarusian path" of development is no longer viable.

Sources: Belapan, May 23; Itar-Tass, May 23; Interfax-Ukraine, May 23; BBC Monitoring, May 23; Respublika, May 24)
Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 26, 2006

Belarusian Opposition Seeks Direction After Presidential Election

By Jan Maksymiuk

There are essentially two ideas among the Belarusian opposition about how to proceed after the presidential election in March, which led to the largest outburst of antigovernment protests in Belarus in the past decade. The younger generation of opposition activists wants former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who has no party affiliation, to lead a broad movement focused on bringing about political change in Belarus. But some opposition parties appear wary of losing their political stature, and prefer to continue to make all strategic decisions pertaining to the opposition through a collective body or a national convention.

Despite the opposition's overwhelming loss to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's in Belarus's presidential election in March, the organization that represents the major opposition parties in Belarus saw room for optimism in the election result. The Political Council of Democratic Forces, which assisted Milinkevich in his bid to prevent Lukashenka from winning a third term in office, has as-

essed the opposition election campaign as satisfactory. Official results had Milinkevich winning just 6 percent of the vote in the March 19 election, which monitors from the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) said failed to meet democratic standards. However, the Political Council has determined that Milinkevich actually achieved 20 percent support -- numbers that were confirmed last month by an independent postelection survey.

Those results, the Political Council believes, are strong enough for the entire democratic camp to build upon in posing a greater challenge to Lukashenka's authoritarian regime in the future. And here is where problems begin.

Last month, a group of younger and more radical opposition activists, who protested against the election result in a five-day tent camp on October Square in Minsk, proposed that Milinkevich lead a broad movement in Belarus with the aim of deposing Lukashenka. One of those activists is Ihar Lyalkou from the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF). The BNF proposed Milinkevich as a presidential candidate during an opposition convention in August 2005, which gave Milinkevich a narrow edge over Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party (AHP). "The main thing we want today in the country and the democratic movement is to create the situation in which this movement could come to real power," Lyalkou said. "We have, both in the provinces and Minsk, teams of professionals who are ready even today to become Alyaksandr Milinkevich's closest aides in the leadership of the movement."

Lyalkou and his colleagues do not want to abolish the Political Council of Democratic Forces. But Lyalkou told RFE/RL that they want Milinkevich to be solely responsible for executive decisions in the new movement. "The movement should have the Political Council, composed of the leaders of political parties," he said. "The council should remain in order to define basic, strategic directions of the movement's activity. And there must be some executive body, which should be staffed not according to party quotas but according to exclusively professional qualities [of the staff]. This national committee should be formed by Mr. Milinkevich personally."

On April 26, during an opposition rally in Minsk to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, Milinkevich announced the creation of a Movement for Freedom. Milinkevich predicted that the opposition, if united, could depose Lukashenka in the next two years through actions of civil disobedience.

But some are skeptical of the idea of making Milinkevich the primary voice of the opposition, including AHP deputy head Yaraslau Ramanchuk, who said that the "movement makes sense if it is built on the currently existing coalition and includes both [opposition candidate Alyaksandr] Kazulin's party [Social Democratic Party] and the youth that does not belong to any party or youth groups. I think this initiative is disastrous for Milinkevich as a politician." Ramanchuk believes that the Political Council of Democratic Forces should continue to coordinate opposition actions in the future, with strategic political decisions being made at national conventions.

Ramanchuk told RFE/RL that the people who want Milinkevich to be a national opposition leader represent only one political party and do not speak for the majority of the demonstrators -- mostly young people with no party affiliation -- who came to October Square in March to protest the election. "The people who promote the movement led by Milinkevich belong to one group -- the BNF," he said. "They have been, are, and will continue to be in politics and the BNF. What, are they essentially going to run this movement? Therefore, I don't want Alyaksandr Milinkevich's electoral potential to be lost because of such initiatives."

But Lyalkou argues that from now on Milinkevich should be promoted in Belarus as an icon of the anti-Lukashenka opposition. "The situation is such that for the first time in the past 12 years we have had a real, generally accepted -- both within our country and abroad -- leader who is an alternative to Lukashenka," he said. "Therefore, the starting conditions for a real change of the situation in the country are very good."

Judging by Ukraine's example, Lyalkou may be right. The opposition to Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma's regime began to score significant political successes only after Viktor Yushchenko united it under the banner of the Our Ukraine bloc in 2002 and became its clear leader. By the beginning of 2005, Yushchenko was president.

(Yury Drakakhrust from RFE/RL's Belarus Service contributed to this report.)

RFE/RL Newsline., May 4, 2006, End Note

HISTORICAL DATES

June 19, 1924

Birthdate of **Vasil Bykau**, an outstanding Belarusian writer and public figure. Most of his works covered the topic of World War Two, experienced by him as a soldier.



Vasil Bykau

Towards the end of his life he was forced to seek refuge abroad. He lived in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. He was forced out of his homeland due to attacks in the state-run press and censorship of his writings. The regime continues to take revenge against Bykau even after his death. Vasil

Bykau's books are not being republished in Belarus and films about his life and creative work are banned.

Bykau was considered for the Nobel prize in literature in late 1990. He died on June 22, 2003.

Culture & Society

A Sense of Place: Stories from Belarus

By Paul B. Miller

The stories my grandmother Rose (Rochel Schwartz, nee Knopova) used to tell were more like fairy tales, really, when I think about how they contrasted with my own life. It's not that I didn't believe them or didn't want to believe them, it's just that I had no way of entering her chaotic, poverty stricken East European world other than through my imagination.

Paul Miller, a third generation American, was intrigued by his grandmother's stories about life in the shtetl in what is now newly independent Belarus. He had long wanted to see the place for himself. What finally helped him to decide was when he met his second cousin Arkadi Falevich, a Minsk businessman who came to the States to attend an electrical trade show, and who offered to be his guide.

So I went to Belarus. This was, mind you, not a spur-of-the-moment decision taken with the knowledge that my grandmother did not have long to live. She didn't, but I had talked about visiting her village of Syalets (which in Belarusian means a small village) near Mahilyow for years. I even hunted down in the National Archives the passenger list of the S.S. Lithuania, which set sail for America on July 16, 1923, with my grandma, Rochel Knopova on board, and who was certified by the immigration authorities as neither a polygamist, nor a communist revolutionary or anarchist infiltrator. (She was, however, a budding capitalist, with three American dollars in her pocket, courtesy of her brother in Chicago.) The idea of going there, of being in that place, had possessed me even before I got to college and learned the difference between the Soviet Union and Russia. Then, in 1986, Chernobyl dealt a major setback. But in 1989, the year I moved a continent closer to start graduate school on the East Coast, big changes were afoot in my grandmother's former part of the world. Though I wouldn't meet Arkadi for another decade, I never stopped promising myself that I would get there someday, somehow.

It's not easy to go to Belarus today, though I can't imagine why would anyone besides a root-seeking Jew or a government official with a lousy posting. You need a visa, and the gatekeeper of visas at the Belarusian embassy in Washington seemed caught between a Soviet power trip and the bureaucratic inefficiency of a new state without any sense of why it exists in the first place. The country's democratically elected autocrat, Alexander Lukashenka, appears adamant on having his young republic rejoin mother Russia. How the embassy came to reside, so shortly after the Cold War, in such a beautiful townhouse on a leafy street near Dupont Circle is anybody's guess. But how they came to hire this visa officer who conveys commissar-like rudeness to Americans who want to visit his country is beyond conjecture. "Why you go to Belarus?" he demanded of me in a rather unpleasant tone of voice. He again shouted this like a mantra the next two times I called about the visa form he had promised, and then failed to fax. "Because it's there," I felt like replying, and I

was irresistibly drawn to the new nation's world famous beaches and the decadent lifestyle that had developed around its resort culture. But I didn't dare. "I go to Belarus," I told him, because I have family in Belarus — my mom's second cousin, of whose existence I had only learned recently. He lives in the capital Minsk, and his son Sasha is my third cousin. But the official's point, if uncouth and inadvertent, was well-taken — why would anyone want to go to Belarus?

I realize now that my trip really began in this embassy. The visa never did come, and my passport disappeared with it, the same embassy official alleged, in the inefficient U.S. postal system. Three weeks before my flight I got a new passport and, after paying another \$150 and being made to wait half a day, I got the visa stamp too. But it wasn't until I arrived in Minsk that I realized how helpless I was in the hands of a government that still used forms marked СССР (Cyrillic for USSR) and displayed hammer and sickle motifs as if they expected Comrade Stalin to rise from the dead at any moment. Arkadi and his family picked me up from the fully marble tiled airport, whisked me off in their chauffeured two-door Soviet-era jalopy that refused to start more than once, and headed directly for an overcrowded office, where I later learned people were registering for new apartments, and I had to register as a foreign citizen. The rest is a blur. For an entire week I just tagged behind Arkadi, whose breakneck pace through the city matched his remarkable ability to always locate the most important person in any given situation.

There were several things about Belarus that I never understood and, eventually, learned to stop trying to have explained: The elegantly coiffed man in the perfectly tailored three-piece suit stationed permanently by the hotel money-changing booth; the frumpy looking women sitting all day at desks on each floor of the hotel; why I never saw the inside (or the outside for that matter) of my relatives' apartment; why Arkadi slipped his friend some money after we played tennis at a private club, and why we still had to change our clothes outside in the cold; or why Arkadi had a full-time driver for such a beat-up old car. I failed to learn why the secretaries in all the companies I visited with my cousin never seemed to work, but had such enormous offices; what Arkadi and a business contact were shouting about at the tops of their lungs in an adjacent room, while the secretary filed her nails and I stared blankly back at her; how people could dress so well and reportedly earn so little; why there was never anyone in the restaurants; how the remnant Jewish population managed to put on such a vibrant music and dance performance for Israel's Independence Day, in the midst of a city that seemed to care for little.

But I had not gone to Minsk to add my own clever observations and confusion about Soviet style bureaucracy and the black market to those who came earlier, and who had taken far greater risks delivering care packages to refuseniks in the 1970s. My mission was a personal rather than public one: I was there to seek out the past — my past — rather than altruistically help the needy. It was on the fourth day that Arkadi, I and Sasha with the ubiquitous driver set off for Mahilyow and Syalets; an indescribably anticipatory morning in which I imagined myself the family anthropologist, about to connect Old World identity to our diasporic American homogeneity.

The village of Syalets is not difficult to describe. There is a paved well traveled road, now known as the Cosmonaut Avenue,

that heads south from Mahilyow and more or less parallels the Dnieper River to the west. After several miles and two war memorials, one comes to a white sign with black lettering on the side of the road that reads: Сялец (Syalets). Then there are wooden, peaked-roof houses and barns in various states of weathered disrepair on both sides of the road for about a quarter mile. Soon, there are no more houses and you are out of the village. That's not an entirely fair description, but the village is more like a suburb, albeit one that probably hasn't grown much since the days when mostly Jews lived there. Back then it had two synagogues and there were mezuzahs on the doors, but I saw no trace of either despite closely inspecting each house for the telltale discoloration of the wooden frames. Only later did I learn that almost every structure had been rebuilt since the Second World War.

That war, which in America exists almost exclusively in Hollywood and the kind of commercial mythmaking that has given us such memorable distortions as "the good war" and "the greatest generation," exists everywhere in Belarus. Not only do monuments, memorials, and museums constitute about the only worthwhile tourist attractions, but the very language of the 1940s is as omnipresent as if the enemy were still lurking in the next primeval forest. While most American college students could not even define 'fascist', let alone date the term, in today's Belarus it is part of everyday discourse: "The fascists did this/ the fascists did that; then we defeated the fascists, and banished the fascists, and we still struggle every day to make sure that the fascists never come back." After the war, of course, the fascists became us, or any Western country with a free market. But more than ten years into the as yet unnamed epoch of the post Cold War, Belarusians are still obsessed with fascists. The Great Patriotic War had lived up to its inspired name far better than any of the communist leaders who came up with it in those desperate times could ever have imagined.

It's not hard to remain mired in the past when that past is Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. Belarus lost nearly two million people during the war, a quarter of its total population. This "demographic catastrophe of the first order," explains Holocaust historian Martin Dean, was due to a combination of Soviet deportations, Red Army and partisan warfare, postwar emigration and, of course, the Holocaust. Some 350,000 Belarusian Jews were murdered by the Germans and their collaborators between June 1941 and April 1944. The Nazis even considered building a gassing facility in Minsk as the capital's ghetto overflowed with German Jews brought there in the fall of 1941.

But while the worthy heroics of the Red Army are trumpeted from every prominent hill and intersection in Belarus, one could pass through the former Minsk ghetto today without even knowing it. The two most distinctive and inspiring memorials were actually placed there by German citizens of Hamburg and Düsseldorf in 1993 and 1998, respectively. A few mock, toppled tombstones with Hebrew lettering, no doubt buried in snow half the year, seemed to be the only homegrown reminder of what had once been. And in a small plaza that the Nazis found well-suited for shooting Jews, there is a *forlorn*, though flower-bedecked when I saw it, obelisk-like monument that appeared lost amidst the white Soviet-era high rises. Nearby, so close that I couldn't keep it out of my camera lens, was an old tire.

In Syalets, however, there is nothing, not even a cracked tombstone fragment where the Jewish cemetery once stood. A *shtetl*

no more, the Syalets of today is a village from the past without a past. It looked no more interesting or familiar to me than any Belarusian village would have, or any village on any planet, for that matter. Despite all the highly touted modernizing reforms of the futuristic Soviet state, Marxist historical inevitability seems to have ensured that this corner of European civilization would inevitably remain a part of history. The main *kolkhoz* building was a rotting hulk; the plowing was being done by a man walking behind a horse; old women were leading their cows through the street as if they depended on them for their next meal; and the people, the people looked as if they had never been to a doctor in their lives, let alone a dentist. Certainly, the town had electricity now, but the poverty of the place bespoke not only a country that had fallen on hard times; it signaled a different, much earlier time altogether.

The irony of it all is that my grandmother's family had actually been well off in that place once upon a time, at least as these things go for East European Jewry. They had a small farm in this swath of rural poverty bleakly known as the Pale of Settlement, and they could walk to the market in Mahilyow and back in less than a day. They could even see my great-grandfather's grave, on their own land, from the kitchen window at the back of the house. But more striking even than their property ownership and proximate peasant status is that my family maintained *two* houses, renting the smaller one across the street to whomever happened to be passing through. That second house, a sort of *pied-à-terre* for the itinerant Belarusian multitude, never did fit into my concept of shtetl culture, in which just having a roof over your head — fiddler or no fiddler — was its own blessing. But this is what my grandmother told me — two houses on either side of a street called Chushay. And she even wrote "Chushay" down for me in her third grade English hand, just so that I wouldn't forget how her little street was called.

I took that piece of paper with me into the streets of Syalets and asked everyone if they knew where I could find Chushay Street. They were, for the most part, nice, and hardly suspicious, and sometimes quite generous. Not even the word "Jew" or "Zhid" seemed to cause consternation. The guy working on a truck in the middle of the sidewalk kept a wary eye on us while pretending to go about his business. But Irena, who wore a pink sweater that said "candy's" on the front and was decorated with hearts and teddy bears, practically begged us to come inside for tea. And Veronica, scary as she was with her single front tooth (like all the women in town, she wore a *shmata* on her head and thick woolen socks with sandals beneath her near ankle length skirt), could not have been more helpful. A middle-aged man who looked far older than he said he was and had at least a year's worth of dirt ground into his skin helped me turn over an enormous rock that I thought, naively enough, might be a Jewish gravestone. The villagers (mostly women), in fact, flocked to us like some caged creatures in a petting zoo, tame and familiar yet somehow exciting and curious. Clearly out of my element (I wasn't sure if chickens could bite, and they were everywhere!), they at least made me, ridiculously attired in jeans and a camel hair jacket, feel rather less uneasy. For that I was grateful.

And yet we were intruders, and felt like intruders; outsiders who had absolutely nothing in common with these people except our own humanity. Arkadi and Sasha could at least communicate with them, but for me standing there as the sun moved in

and out of the clouds, the sight was as piteous as it was puzzling. No one knew anything about a Chushay street or the name Knopov or Dolnick, and it didn't help matters that Arkadi in no time met someone who remembered his grandfather Aron Belatzkin. **All his life in Minsk, and Arkadi had never even thought to go to our family's village, and now here he was, thanks to an American second cousin once removed, chatting away about his grandfather with an ancient Belarusian peasant. Arkadi was clearly moved.** His eyes were moist and he kept looking up at the sky, putting his hand on his chin, and shaking his head in disbelief. I watched the scene unfold with envious anxiety, wanting only to press on, to find even older people who might have some shard of memory of my own direct ancestors.

I got my shard at the end of the day in the form of a near ninety year old woman named Sonya Panteleva. She didn't get around much, so we were invited into her home, where we sat on a patchwork fabric sofa in a kitchen that doubled as the living room. In the unfamiliar surroundings of a peasant hovel in which the ceilings were barely high enough for my 5'9" frame, Sonya confirmed that a man named Pashe Knopov — my grandmother's oldest brother — had existed, and that he was a good man. He actually had two homes, she told me to my utter astonishment, and she answered correctly and unhesitatingly when I asked whether they were next to or across the street from each other.

But those affirmations were about as specific as things got with Sonya; and the rest were mere fragments and flashbacks of clouded memory that added color to the picture my grandmother had conveyed to me, but little in the way of a frame of reference. Pashe had hid in Sonya's home and he himself had saved two little girls, but when and where Sonya could not say. Pashe had money and could send the family to Moscow, though whether or not that is what he in fact did with his wife and children (if he had any) during the war was equally unclear. Pashe was generous — he brought baskets of ripened apples to his neighbors; he gave them matzoh on Pesach, and even money. Yet whether Sonya had known Pashe as a real friend, or simply the Jewish neighbor with whom one got along but kept a certain polite distance, I could not know either. Her eyes and composure betrayed little emotion, as if this was simply a normal part of her youthful memories, with little understanding of the great calamity that had struck the Jewish civilization in the center of which she had grown up. But Sonya was old, and uneducated, and wholly unused to having an American firing off questions in her living room/kitchen. In truth she gave me no reason whatsoever to feel anything but gratitude, and sorrow, for her.

I wanted to stay and survey the surrounding area, perhaps walk to the Dnieper to see where my grandmother might have swum with her older siblings, or at least washed clothes. But Arkadi, the fast-moving pragmatic businessman, himself a direct product of a state that conditioned its people to think only of the glorious socialist future, as opposed to the present and, certainly never, the past, was growing impatient, knowing that I would only be more disappointed. I could picture the layout of my grandmother's village now; understood how the climate and vegetation she grew up with contrasted with the Arizona desert she eventually settled down in; and I could be certain that this precise spot on earth was where all the stories had come from. But in the main my long awaited encounter with Syalets was a little like the name of the street "Chushay" that I had relied on to guide

me to the family farm. No one in that tiny village had ever heard of it, and only at the very end of the day, in Sonya Panteleeva's house, did my cousins realize that I was mispronouncing the Russified French term for road, "chaussée." We had been walking up and down and traversing my family's street all afternoon.

* * *

My grandmother died nine days after I stood nearer to her first home, perhaps on the very spot where it had once sheltered her, than anyone in my American family ever has or, likely, will. I was in a café in Germany, of all places, when I got word of her passing via cell phone, and my family beseeched me to finish my trip rather than try to find a flight to Phoenix. I gave in, though not without an argument, and regret, and a lingering sense of guilt. In Syalets I had scooped up a small bag of soil that I was planning to spread over my grandma's coffin, but now I wouldn't even be there to say Mourner's Kaddish. As it turned out, I couldn't find that bag of dirt anywhere when I got home.

Paul Miller is Associate Professor of history at McDaniel College (Maryland) and the International University of Sarajevo, teaching courses in modern European history and Holocaust/genocide. He has published a number of articles on those topics, and is the author of a book entitled: "From Revolutionaries to Citizens: Antimilitarism in France, 1870 — 1914", published in 2002 by Duke University Press.

SPORTS

Belarusian Ice Hockey Matures

This year's ice hockey World Championship was held in May in Latvia's capital city of Riga. After years of varied successes in 2006 Winter Olympics and earlier international competitions, Belarus' national team really "arrived" and became a respected member of world's ice hockey elite.

It all began with the unexpected victory 2:1 over favored Slovakia and a close loss (3:2) to the Russian team widely expected to win the overall title.

As the championship progressed, Belarusians managed to edge the strong Swiss team 2:1 and overwhelmed Ukraine by the score of 9:1.

They succeeded in reaching the championship's quarterfinals, in which they succumbed to Finland 3:0 in a tenacious and even encounter. Four of the team's members were named to the championship's All-Star team.

Much of the national team's success may be attributed to methodical and effective work by its new Canadian coach Glen Hanlon.

As lately international hockey tournaments are being held more often in Central and Eastern Europe (Vienna, Prague, Riga), they are attracting more fans both from Belarus and the Belarusian emigre communities in this part of Europe. In Prague, for instance, Belarusian fans have been regularly flocking to the city's "sport bars," to support their team with loud cheers and the national white-red-white flag.

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. REPRESSIONS

April 3, 2006

OPPOSITION PROTESTER REPORTEDLY DIES IN MINSK HOSPITAL

Opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich's headquarters announced on March 30 that it received a report that Syarhey Atroshchanka, a resident of Hrodna Oblast who was allegedly severely injured when police broke up opposition demonstrations on March 25, died in Minsk's Hospital No. 9 on March 29, BelaPAN reported. The report could not be independently confirmed. Milinkevich's headquarters accused police and healthcare officials of refusing to provide information on Atroshchanka's condition and called on all those who know anything about the circumstances of his reported beating and what happened to him afterward to report their information to Milinkevich's office.

April 28, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS GET JAIL TERMS...

United opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Syarhey Kalyakin, manager of Milinkevich's election campaign, were sentenced on April 27 to 15 and 14 days in jail, respectively, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. A judge found the politicians guilty of taking part in the previous day's unauthorized rally that took place in front of the Academy of Sciences building in Minsk on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. "It was not an unsanctioned rally. We took part in an absolutely authorized event.... They are scared. They want to scare us but they themselves are trembling," Milinkevich told RFE/RL's Belarus Service after the verdict. Another judge on April 27 sentenced Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka and Labor Party leader Alyaksandr Bukhvostau to 15 days each, finding them guilty of violating regulations governing "mass events" during the April 26 Chernobyl Way rally in Minsk. Vyachorka was arrested immediately after the rally, while Milinkevich, Kalyakin, and Bukhvostau were detained on April 27.

May 2, 2006

COURT OPENS CLOSURE SUIT AGAINST UNION OF BELARUSIAN WRITERS.

The Supreme Court on April 28 began hearings in the Justice Ministry's suit for the closure of the Union of Belarusian Writers (SBP), BelaPAN reported. The ministry accuses the SBP, which is seen by state-run media as politicized and nationalistic, of using the banned emblem Pahonya (an image of a knight in pursuit) on the plaque marking the entrance to the House of Writers in Minsk and of utilizing a stamp that features the union's name without inverted commas. The ministry also claims the SBP lacks an original copy of its charter and accuses the organization of making available the House of Writers' cafeteria for a conference of the opposition Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) in 2005. SBP Chairman Ales Pashkevich said during the April 28 session that the accusations are not sufficient grounds

to suspend the association, let alone to close it. He denied the SPB's involvement in the preparation and holding of the party conference. In November, more than 100 writers loyal to the government set up the Union of Writers of Belarus as an alternative to the SBP ..

May 16, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST FACES LENGTHY PRISON TERM.

A district court in Minsk is scheduled on May 17 to begin the trial of Yury Radzivil, who is accused of endangering the life of elite police (Almaz) officers on March 2, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. If found guilty, he could receive a six-year prison term. Radzivil, who worked for the election staff of opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, on March 2 drove in his car to a police station where police were holding Kazulin and some 20 of his supporters who were arrested earlier that day. When several police officers attempted to get into the vehicle, Radzivil reportedly locked the car and drove off. One officer fired several shots at the car. Radzivil managed to escape but was arrested later that day and charged with resisting arrest and using force against police. "[Radzivil] is a young man who got involved in big politics and narrowly escaped death.... Now he is being framed to cover those who actually violated the law," said Uladzimir Nistsyuk, who worked with Radzivil on Kazulin's election team.

May 19, 2006

OPPOSITION YOUTH LEADERS JAILED IN BELARUS.

Two leaders of the opposition youth group Malady Front, Zmitser Dashkevich and Artur Finkevich, were sentenced to 15 days in jail by a district court in Minsk on May 18, BelaPAN news agency reported. The two men were arrested on May 17 when they arrived at the court building where opposition activist Yury Radzivil was being tried. The police claim that the two yelled obscenities and arrested them on charges of "petty hooliganism." On May 18, Judge Nadzeya Ravutskaya fined Katsyaryna Shatsikova 70,000 rubles (\$33) for "hooliganism." Shatsikova was arrested along with Dashkevich and Finkevich in front of the court.

May 30, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS JAILED FOR FIVE MONTHS ON CHARGES OF INCITING RIOTS.

A court in Shchuchyn, Hrodna Oblast, on May 29 sentenced Syarhey Lyashkevich to five months in jail, finding him guilty of training opposition activists to stage riots. BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Lyashkevich headed a local election headquarters of opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich during the presidential election campaign earlier this year. The judge said Lyashkevich instructed oppositionists in how to stage riots by showing them videotapes of street demonstrations. The defense argued that the videotapes could hardly be training aids as they had repeatedly been shown by Belarusian television channels. The main witness for the prosecution was a man sentenced three times for criminal offenses in the past. The key evidence in Lyashkevich's case was a videotape showing onstage performances by Belarusian pop stars interspersed with footage of clashes between opposition protesters and police at various times between 1996 and 2000.

June 1, 2006

BELARUSIAN KGB TO CHARGE FOUR IN CONNECTION WITH ILLEGAL ORGANIZATION...

State Security Committee (KGB) chief Stsyapan Sukharenka told journalists in Minsk on May 31 that the criminal case against four members of an unregistered group named Partnyorstva (Partnership) will soon be sent to court, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Tsimaŭefy Dranchuk, Alyaksandr Shalayka, Mikalay Astreyka, and Enira Branitskaya were arrested by the KGB on February 21 on charges of setting up an illegal organization that "encroaches upon the individuality, rights, and duties of citizens." If found guilty, they may be imprisoned for up to three years. Partnyorstva gained prominence for its observation effort during Belarus' parliamentary elections and referendum in 2004. Only one of the four was allowed to see a relative during the 100 days of their detention. Relatives of the four fear that the Partnyorstva trial will be held behind closed doors.

June 2, 2006

KGB CONTINUES SEARCH FOR SUPPOSED TERRORISTS

KGB chief Sukharenka also told journalists on May 31 that his organization continues to investigate a case concerning the preparation of terrorists acts before the March 19 presidential election in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Sukharenka told a news conference in Minsk on March 16 that the KGB detained four people who had prepared bomb attacks at four schools in Minsk. A videotape presented by the KGB at that news conference showed an interview with an unidentified person who claimed that he had been trained in "camps of militants" abroad how to use firearms and to poison water-supply systems with the help of dead rats. KGB spokesman Valery Nadtachayeu told RFE/RL that the terrorism case does not involve the detained members of Partnyorstva.

June 16, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST SENTENCED FOR SLANDERING PRESIDENT

A court in Orsha, Vitsebsk Oblast, on June 15 sentenced Mikalay Razumau to a three-year restricted-freedom term, finding him guilty of slandering President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. "Restricted-freedom" punishment, known in post-Soviet prison slang as "khimiya," means that a convict has to live in a sort of prison barracks, work for a specified enterprise or organization in a designated area, and report to the barracks administration at an appointed time every day. The incriminating evidence against Razumau was a videotape showing opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich's meeting with voters in February. Razumau reportedly said at that meeting that Lukashenka was involved in the disappearance of opposition politicians Yuri Zakharanka and Viktor Hanchar in 1999. In 2003, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) rapporteur Christos Pourgourides released a report suggesting that Belarusian top-ranking officials might have been involved in arranging the disappearance of Belarusian opposition figures. Pourgourides also alleged that "steps were taken at the highest level of the state to actively cover up the true background of the disappearances".

2. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

April 27, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MARKS CHORNOBYL ANNIVERSARY WITH ANTIPRESIDENTIAL MARCH

An estimated crowd of 7,000-10,000 mainly young people took part in the Chernobyl Way rally organized by the Belarusian opposition in Minsk on April 26, Belarusian and international news agencies reported. The rally was permitted by the authorities who, however, warned demonstrators to stay away from October Square, which was the site of protests last month against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's reelection. "If we stay together, we can defeat a dictatorship that denied the Belarusian people a choice and kept them from electing the president legally," Milinkevich told the crowd from the steps of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences building. "We will destroy this regime through acts of peaceful disobedience. We will not wait for the next election in five years. We can overcome the dictatorship in the next two years, perhaps sooner." Milinkevich called on people to join the newly created civic movement For Freedom. Belarusian Television reported in its main newscast in the evening that the rally was attended by "several hundred regulars for whom going to meetings is a favorite hobby."

May 15, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER STARTS BUILDING MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM.

Former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who was released from jail on May 12 after serving a 15-day sentence, met with opposition activists from Minsk and Minsk Oblast later the same day, Belapan reported. Among the topics of discussion was the establishment of the national movement For Freedom, which was announced by Milinkevich during an opposition rally in April. Milinkevich is planning to embark on May 20 on a series of trips to the provinces to mobilize support for the new movement.

May 31, 2006

BELARUSIAN YOUTH ACTIVISTS GO ON HUNGER STRIKE OVER OFFICIAL HARASSMENT

Seventeen activists of the unregistered opposition organization Youth Front have gone on a hunger strike in Salihorsk, Minsk, and Hrodna, protesting what they call the politically motivated criminal prosecution of their associates, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on May 30. In March, the State Security Committee (KGB) instituted criminal proceedings against Zmitser Dashkevich, Syarhey Lisichonak, Barys Haretski, and Aleh Korbun, charging them with running an unregistered organization that "encroaches" on citizens' rights. Similar charges were later brought against Syarhey Marchyk, Andrey Yuruts, and Viktar Kislyuk in Baranavichy, as well as Anastasiya Azarka in Nyasvizh.

June 19, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PROTESTER SCALES TRANSMISSION TOWER

Young oppositionist Krystsina Shatsikava on June 18 climbed a television-transmitter tower in central Vitsebsk, hanging up an opposition white-red-white flag and tying herself to the metal structure, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Shatsikava reportedly spent some four hours on the tower before police managed to get her down. "A policeman climbed up to her

and started to beat her on the head," a witness told RFE/RL on condition of anonymity. "Krystsina was crying awfully. Then three vehicles from the Emergency Situations Ministry arrived, and two fire brigades, and three special-task troopers climbed up to her and tied her there — they tied her hands, fastened some hooks, put some collar around her neck. These special-task troopers kicked her in the head as they were taking her down." Shatsikava was reportedly taken to a police station and later hospitalized.

June 22, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION BRIEFS EU ON THREATS TO INDEPENDENCE

Former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich said at a meeting with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso in Brussels earlier this week that the EU and the United States should stress at the G-8 summit in Russia in July that any Belarusian referendum on a proposed state union with Russia would be illegal, BelaPAN reported on June 21. "It is impossible to recognize the results of a referendum conducted in an undemocratic country," Milinkevich told BelaPAN, adding that he fears that Belarus might lose its independence if it forms a union with Russia. Milinkevich noted that this issue met with the full understanding of EU officials in Brussels. Milinkevich and Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, visited Brussels on June 20, where they discussed possible new projects to support civil society in Belarus. Meanwhile, the European Union and the United States said in a declaration adopted at an EU-U.S. summit in Vienna on June 21 that they "will continue to support the democratic aspirations of the people of Belarus and work together to strengthen democratic institutions, assist civil society, and promote independent media."

3. REGIME ACTIONS and STATEMENTS

April 13, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE TO BE RELEASED ON PAROLE

A district court in Minsk on April 12 decided to release opposition activist Mikhail Marynich on parole, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Marynich was sentenced in December 2004 to five years in prison in a bizarre case in which he was found guilty of stealing computers from the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, although the embassy had not reported any such theft. Amnesty International in 2005 declared Marynich a prisoner of conscience. Marynich served as Belarus' minister of foreign economic relations (1994-98) and afterward became Belarusian ambassador to Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. In 2001, Marynich resigned his ambassadorial post to challenge Lukashenka in that year's presidential election. In February 2005, Marynich had his prison sentence reduced to 3 1/2 years in appreciation of his "past services to the state" and "failing health." In August 2005, his term was reduced by another year under an amnesty law.

April 13, 2006

BELARUS TO SPEND \$1.5 BILLION ON CHORNOBYL AFTERMATH DURING NEXT FIVE YEARS

Belarusian Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski said in the Chamber of Representatives, Belarus' lower house, on April 12 that the government is planning to spend 3.3 trillion rubles (\$1.5 billion) in 2006-2010 for its Chernobyl relief program, Belapan reported. Sidorski noted that the main objective of the program is to achieve the "real economic revival and sustainable development" of the contaminated areas. Sixty-three percent of the

planned funds are to go toward allowances for Chernobyl victims. Sidorski said that 11,242 persons disabled by the disaster and some 115,000 veterans of Chernobyl cleanup operations are entitled to these allowances...

May 26, 2006

BELARUS CONFIRMS BAN ON CANADIAN, U.S. OVER-FLIGHTS

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou confirmed on May 25 that the Belarusian government will suspend overfly rights for Canadian and U.S. airplanes, Reuters and BelaPAN reported. Papou noted that the move is in response to last month's refusal by Canada and the United States to refuel a plane carrying Belarus' prime minister to and from Cuba. "Belarus strictly observes symmetry in adopting any sort of retaliatory measures. These restrictions will apply only to two countries — the United States and Canada," Papou told journalists. He did not clarify whether the ban will affect both official and commercial flights or just the former. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka alluded to the introduction of such a ban two days earlier.

June 9, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ACCUSES RUSSIA OVER GAS PRICE

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has accused Russia of jeopardizing an intergovernmental agreement on the creation of equal conditions for economic entities by threatening to raise the price of natural gas to a level 50 percent higher than Russian consumers pay, BelaPAN reported on June 8. Lukashenka told Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov that price increases for gas should be the same for all entities in the Belarusian-Russian union state. The president also told his visitor that Gazprom's claim for control of Beltranshaz, the Belarusian gas-transportation system, could only be accepted if Russia granted Belarus access to the exploitation of hydrocarbon fields. Belarus currently pays Gazprom \$46.68 for 1,000 cubic meters of gas and charges Russia transit fees of \$.75 per 1,000 cubic meters for gas transiting through its pipeline to Europe. Gazprom has threatened to raise the price of gas to European levels of about \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters.

June 16, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO OUTPACE EU IN MUTUAL RAPPROCHEMENT

Lukashenka on June 15 said Belarus will respond by two or three steps to each step made by the European Union toward co-operation, BelaPAN reported. Lukashenka was receiving credentials from Ambassador Ian Boag, the Kyiv-based head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. Lukashenka expressed readiness to accept not only European but also any other civilized and human values and follow them if they meet the interests of the Belarusian people and do not run counter to the country's constitution and laws, which he said are no less civilized than those of European states. The Belarusian president assured the EU envoy that universal human values are the cornerstone of the Belarusian government's policies. Simultaneously, Lukashenka stressed that Belarus will reject any attempts at dictating what it should do and at interfering in its internal affairs.

4. BELARUS and THE WORLD

March 31, 2006

GAZPROM ANNOUNCES PLANS TO HIKE GAS PRICES FOR BELARUS IN 2007.

The Russian gas monopoly Gazprom issued a press release on March 30 quoting CEO Aleksei Miller as telling visiting Belarusian Energy Minister Alyaksandr Ageyev that Belarus will have to pay European prices for gas deliveries in 2007, Interfax reported on March 30. Belarus is to pay \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas in 2006 under the terms of a contract signed in December. Gazprom is currently charging Western European buyers approximately \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters. Russia pays Belarus \$.75 per 1,000 cubic meters per 100 kilometers for transporting gas via the Belarus-owned Beltranshaz pipeline and \$.46 per 1,000 cubic meters/100 kilometers along the Yamal-Europe pipeline owned by Gazprom. In 2006, Russia will deliver 21 billion cubic meters of gas to Belarus.

May 9, 2006

U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's Remarks at the 2006 Vilnius Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania

...All of us are committed to democratic progress in Belarus. That nation has suffered in major wars and experienced terrible losses, and now its people are denied basic freedoms by the last dictatorship in Europe. With us today are democracy advocates from Belarus. We welcome you to this conference. I had also expected to meet today with the opposition leader, Alyaksander Milinkevich — but he was recently put in jail by the regime in Minsk. The regime should end this injustice and free Mr. Milinkevich, along with the other democracy advocates held in captivity. The world knows what is happening in Belarus. Peaceful demonstrators have been beaten, dissidents have vanished, and a climate of fear prevails under a government that subverts free elections and bans your own country's flag. There is no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind. The people of Belarus deserve better. You have the right to determine your destiny. And your great nation has a future in the community of democracies.

June 15, 2006

BELARUS REINTRODUCES CHECKPOINTS AT BORDER WITH RUSSIA

Belarus has recently reintroduced checkpoints at its border with Russia, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on June 14. The checkpoints are manned by officers from the Interior Ministry and the State Customs Committee. Alyaksandr Herasimau from the Interior Ministry told RFE/RL that the reestablishment of checkpoints is a temporary measure intended to regulate cargo shipments. "The point is that any shipment of goods subject to excise tax that enters Belarusian territory or goes in transit must be escorted. But escorting is a paid service," Herasimau said, explaining that his ministry charges some \$500 for escorting a cargo shipment from Belarus' border with Russia to that with Poland. Belarusian economic expert Yaraslau Ramanchuk believes that the reintroduction of checkpoints on the Belarusian-Russian frontier reflects a new trend in bilateral relations. "It is a plan to gradually build customs controls on our eastern border. It is Minsk's preparation for [an anticipated] conflict with Moscow regarding oil and gas," Ramanchuk told RFE/RL. In 1995, Belarus and Russia signed a customs union that eliminated customs controls along their joint border.

5. WORLD'S FOCUS ON BELARUS

April 21, 2006

CANADA DENIES REFUELING STOP FOR BELARUSIAN PREMIER

Canada refused to allow Belarusian Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski's plane to land for refueling en route to Cuba on April 20, Reuters and Belapan reported. Ottawa said the move was caused by its strong concerns about Belarus' commitment to democratization and human rights. "In light of these concerns, we were not prepared to facilitate the entry of senior-level representatives of the Belarusian regime onto Canadian soil" Canadian Foreign Office spokeswoman Pamela Greenwell said. The plane carrying Sidorski and other officials reportedly was to include two persons placed under a EU travel ban for involvement in allegedly rigging last month's presidential election: Belarusian State Television and Radio Company chief Alyaksandr Zimouski and presidential-administration chief ideologist Aleh Pralyaskouski. The plane refueled in Boston instead, after Minsk pledged that Zimouski and Pralyaskouski would not be on board.

June 15, 2006

POLAND REPORTEDLY PREPARES TO LAUNCH TV CHANNEL FOR BELARUS

Poland is planning to begin television broadcasts to Belarus in 2007, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on June 14, quoting Polish journalist Agnieszka Romaszewska, who is working on the project. The planned channel will reportedly focus on information programs broadcast in Belarusian and Russian. The channel will be sponsored by funds from the Polish government and the EU. "The project envisions the creation of a possible separate satellite television channel for Belarus.... At present we are busy looking for funds and partners and carrying out organizational work.... But the channel will be created for sure," Romaszewska told RFE/RL. Romaszewska, who has made numerous television reports and documentaries about Belarus for Polish Television, has been banned from entering Belarus by the Belarusian authorities.

June 20, 2006

U.S. IMPOSES FINANCIAL SANCTIONS ON BELARUSIAN OFFICIALS

U.S. President George W. Bush on June 20 issued an executive order imposing targeted financial sanctions on Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and nine senior officials of his government in response to what Washington sees as a fraudulent presidential election on March 19, international media reported. "These persons will not be able to access any assets that they might have in the United States, and U.S. financial institutions, wherever located, will not be able to provide any financial services to them," White House spokesman Tony Snow commented on the sanctions. The officials targeted by the sanctions also include the justice minister, the interior minister, the KGB chief, the head of the Central Election Commission, the head of the State Radio and Television Company, the Security Council secretary, the head of presidential bodyguards, a deputy head of the presidential administration, and the commander of a special rapid-reaction unit.

BELARUS' FORUM

Opposition Leader Speaks About Detention Experiences

Belarusian Popular Front head Vintsuk Vyachorka was the deputy head of opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich's campaign during the March presidential election. During the course of his political career, Vyachorka has been detained several times by the authorities. He spoke to RFE/RL correspondent Valentinas Mite about his time spent in detention centers as a political prisoner.

RFE/RL: How do the authorities go about detaining people? And who is it that does this?

Vintsuk Vyachorka: As a rule, they come from a special department of police, the so-called OMON, which has now been renamed 'Spetsnaz' [special operations police unit]. Very often they are dressed in plain clothes. They do not produce any documents and perform their duties in a very rough way. They twisted my hands and though they did not throw me face down to the ground or on the floor of a bus, they often treat other people this way.

RFE/RL: Tell us more about your detention during the presidential campaign last March.

Vyachorka: I was detained in a rough way on March 8 after I organized Milinkevich's campaign rally, by the way a completely legal one, aimed at meeting with voters. People in plain clothes seized the bus where we were transporting our [sound] equipment. The head of Minsk's police unit [in charge] of public security, in person ordered me to spread my legs and to put my hands on the wall [while he conducted a search.] He was very happy that I was caught on that bus and told me he wanted to get me for a long time.

RFE/RL: What usually happens after being detained?

Vyachorka: The police take away everything from you, everything you have in your pockets, as their instructions say that all items, with which you can hang yourself, have to be taken away. After a detention, a person is transported to a detention center. Here a person, if he is detained on Friday, spends a night or two before a trial. He is kept until Monday [for a trial.]

RFE/RL: What are the conditions like in Belarusian detention centers?

Vyachorka: After a trial, when you are given a sentence, you become a full-fledged detainee. The state takes care of your expenses. It means that twice a day you get food. In the morning you get porridge and tea. You get soup, porridge, a cutlet and also tea in the evening. And also bread. They give enough bread and there are no problems with the quantity of food, but there is nothing positive to say about the variety and vitamins in the food.

RFE/RL: What was it like in the detention centers after the postelection protests were dispersed in March?

Vyachorka: Many people were arrested in March. All in all, some 1,000 -1,300 people were detained in Belarus. All

the prisons were overcrowded. In the cell, where I was put, there were around 14 people and some were sleeping on the floor.

RFE/RL: What was the attitude of the institution's administration toward political detainees?

Vyachorka: I would not say that the bosses of the detention center, the personnel of the center, treated the political detainees roughly in some way. On the contrary, they treated them rather softly. If it is possible to say, speaking about a jail, they treated us normally. However, just before the elections and during the elections some special measures were introduced from above. For instance, it was not allowed to get anything from the outside — no provisions, no newspapers, no nothing, and it was called a quarantine."

RFE/RL: How did ordinary detainees treat political prisoners?

Vyachorka: When I was detained in April, after the Chernobyl March, I was housed together with the center's usual inhabitants — hooligans and so on. I have never experienced these people to treat political detainees badly, unless they were given special orders.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, June 20, 2006.

Belarusians Abroad

Chernobyl Demonstration in New York City

On April 27 the Belarusian diaspora staged a rally and demonstration of solidarity with victims of the Chernobyl disaster and the democratic forces in Belarus. The rally attracted about 70 persons, mainly young people, from New York, New Jersey, Boston and Philadelphia.

The meeting was addressed by Messrs. Vital Zajka, chairman of the New York Branch of the Belarusian-American Association, Anton Shukieloyts, its national chairman, and Zianon Pazniak, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front.

The speakers noted that Belarus faces today two main problems: consequences of the Chernobyl disaster and Lukashenka's dictatorship. The dictatorship makes it impossible to rehabilitate the regions and population affected by the disaster, and therefore the two problems must be solved at the same time.



The demonstrators distributed informational pamphlets about the disaster to passersby. The entire event was covered by reporters of Associated Press and the Russian TV channel RTVI.

The rally continued at Belarus' consulate in New York and Belarus' representation at the UN.

Source: newspaper BIELARUS, New York, May 2006

Latvia's Order of Three Stars presented to Viacka Celesh

Mr. Celesh is a well known artist and respected civic and cultural leader of the Belarusian community in Latvia. He is the founder of the association of Belarusian artists in Baltic states *Maju Honar* (I have the honor).

The Three Stars Order is Latvia's highest honor, awarded in recognition of work for the good of the state of Latvia.

Source: Information Center of ZBS Backauscyna, May 2006.

Poland: Accusations against the weekly NIVA lifted

It's been almost 3 years since the members of the programming council of the Belarusian weekly NIVA, have been charged with the alleged violation of bookkeeping laws.

The prosecution itself determined that the accusations were based on the fact that accounting forms were filled out improperly; it was determined that not a single zloty (Polish currency) from the state subsidy was misappropriated.

The final trial of NIVA's programming council was held on May 16 in Bielastok. It resulted in full acquittal of the accused. The court stated that the accusations were misconstrued and politically motivated.

Unfortunately, the lengthy court proceedings had a negative effect on the life of Belarusian minority in Poland; for instance, members of NIVA's programming council were barred from participating in local elections scheduled for October 2006.

The accusations against the weekly NIVA evoked appeals to Poland's authorities and many expressions of support from the Belarusian diaspora in Europe, from Belarus itself, and from overseas, as well from well-wishers in Poland itself.

The final court session was attended by many representatives of Belarus' democratic society, to whom Mr. Jauhien Vappa, the editor-in-chief of NIVA, expressed his gratitude.

Source: Information bulletin of ZBS Backauscyna, May 2006.

Warsaw, Poland: A Festival of the Independent Belarusian Culture..

This festival, formally entitled *Mediawave - Belarus' Free Space*, was held in Warsaw on May 12-14, 2006.

It was staged by the organization *Belarusian Initiative*, headed by Mr. Uladzimir Michnievic.

The program of the festival included the following features:

- showing of films produced by Halina Adamovich and Viktor Dashchuk, meetings with these directors,
- presentation of works of Belarusian writers - Andrey Khadanovich and others,
- appearances of Belarusian folklore groups: *Vietakh*, *Hostsitsa*, and *Olmira*.

The objective of Mediawave festivals is to popularize the various cultural initiatives of Europe (of a non-commercial nature). They have been staged in Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and now in Poland.

Source: Information bulletin of ZBS Backauscyna, May 2006

MEDIA WATCH

BOOK REVIEW

Prospects for Democracy in Belarus

Edited by Joerg Forbrigg, David R. Marples, and Pavol Demes
ISBN 80-969487-2-5 p.b.
Slovak Republic: The German Marshall Fund of the United States,
2006, 193 p.

This is a joint project of the German Marshall Fund (U.S.A.) and the Heinrich Boll Foundation (Berlin). The editors have assembled contributions by political analysts and scholars from Belarus, West-East Europe, and North America in the wake of conferences in Warsaw and Bratislava devoted to the 2006 elections and political developments in Belarus.

The foreword is by Alyaksandr Milinkevich, one of the candidates for the presidency of Belarus in the recent elections. By way of orienting the reader to the general political climate in the Republic, Vitali Silitski analyzes the reign of Aleksandr Lukashenka and chronicles his administration from 1994 to the present. Dr. Silitski is a well-known Belarusian scholar and political analyst, who, having earned his Ph.D. from Rutgers University, is presently serving as a visiting researcher at Stanford University. His conclusion is that this year's events in Belarus are "encouraging signs of hope, rather than a ... failed color revolution."

The material in the book is grouped into four topical sections: a) Domestic developments in Belarus preceding the presidential elections; b) Belarus in the international context; c) The 2006 presidential elections in Belarus; and d) Prospects for democracy in the Republic following the elections.

Section provides an analysis of the political climate in the Republic in the decade prior to the Spring of 2006. Ethan Burger and Viktor Minchuk give an overview of Lukashenka's growth and consolidation of power since the first elections of 1994. The authors detail the incident of Drazdy (1998) as one of the most significant tests of the determination of the western diplomatic communities. While it is noteworthy, the fact is that Lukashenka had begun to confront the western diplomatic communities – as well as his own political establishment – almost as soon as the elections of 1994 were concluded: issues with the opposition in the Thirteenth Supreme Soviet, shooting the balloons, confrontation with the labor unions, disregard of the constitutional requirements prior to the referendum of 1995.

Oleg Manaev performs the Herculean task of plumbing public opinion in Belarus in the period October 17, 2004 to March 19, 2006. Although the notion of public opinion in Belarus raises a number of questions, Manaev asserts that although the regime does not have sufficient public support, democratic modes of thinking need strengthening.

David R. Marples and Uladzimir Padhol present an authoritative, well-documented, and updated survey of political parties and the democratic opposition in the run-up to the 2006 elections. They point out the unevenness of opposition groups in Belarus and stress that the opposition will only become effective when greater cooperation among the various groups is achieved. They emphasize the main dilemma

for the opposition forces is the degree of cooperation with Russia that should be attempted. Notwithstanding the numerous obstacles and problems facing them, the fact that the majority of the opposition parties was able to agree on supporting a single candidate is viewed as a positive and encouraging as the political process goes forward.

Andrei Sannikov and Inna Kuley, two leading civic pro-democracy activists, underline the importance of cooperation between the opposition parties and society at large.

The second part of this volume is devoted to an analysis of relations and steps toward cooperation among Belarus, Russia, and the western democracies. The European Union by and large shares the views of the United States. Both are strongly committed to supporting the development of a democratic society in Belarus, a free-market economy, intellectual freedom, and human rights. These goals have been expressed and supported by several American administrations, culminating in the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004.

On the other hand, Russia's position vis-à-vis Belarus is not altogether clear. Even as Russia supports the dictatorship of A. Lukashenka, and encourages a policy of "integration," i.e., absorption of Belarus into the Russian-state framework, it promotes its own imperial aspirations toward Belarus by economic pressure. While Lukashenka plays the "Russian card" very well, he continues to consolidate his own position politically.

Balazs Jarabik critically surveys the various kinds of assistance by the various democracies and their effectiveness in assisting Belarus. He finds that the varieties of assistance need to be reviewed, revised, and in a number of instances, changed.

The third section of the book is given over to the 2006 presidential elections themselves. Long-time scholar of Belarus David R. Marples provides an authoritative survey of the elections, pointing out that the final date may have been selected to accommodate President Vladimir Putin as the G-8 Summit approached. In analyzing Lukashenka's dictatorial measures, Marples compares the 2006 campaign with previous ones and concludes that the 2006 elections weakened, rather than strengthened, Lukashenka's regime. Two long chapters give excellent diary-type accounts of the events of March 2006 in Minsk, and another chapter is entitled "A Photographic Diary." This section concludes with an overview of international responses to the elections and the attention that Belarus received preceding and following the election.

The fourth and final section is more theoretical in nature. David J. Kramer, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, discusses how the West generally, including western Europe, and the United States in particular, can assist in supporting the development of democracy in Belarus. The United States and the European Union stand united in their desire to see the development of a democratic Belarus, with its people free to choose their own government.

The remaining articles, authored by several European political leaders deal with the possible mechanisms for rendering support to democrats and democratically-oriented groups in Belarus and other East European countries. A variety of suggestions along this vein are offered to opinion makers, policy-developers, and political leaders.

The coverage of the 2006 elections and subsequent events in the Republic evoked an enormous amount of interest and received an unusual amount of media coverage in the western world. Commentary on various aspects of the political scene in Belarus became a daily and weekly feature of the print media, radio and television coverage.

The present volume is a distillation of some of the best analyses that emerged from this torrent of coverage and will serve as a dependable guide for students, scholars, and politicians concerned with Belarusica.

One reservation needs to be registered, however. A signal factor characterizing the present state administration in Belarus is missing from these western studies: the biological hatred of *national Belarus* by Lukashenka and his colleagues. It is not hyperbole to assert that Lukashenka **hates** the Belarusian language, culture, and history. From the beginning of his presidency, he has crusaded *against* Belarusianness – against use of the language in the public square, against its appearance in publications, against schools where it is taught. He has succeeded in infusing **fear** into the Belarusian-speaking population. He is an exemplary follower of Imperial Russian policies of denigration. And this is arguably the main reason the Russians tolerate him and his intolerable policies. This *biological hatred* should be factored into any discussion of the Lukashenka regime and its policies.

Dr. Vitaut Kipel

PRESS REVIEW

U.S. to Sanction Belarus for Stifling Protests (*The Washington Post*, by William Branigin, March 25, 2006) —

The White House yesterday denounced the suppression of political protests in Belarus and said the United States planned to join European nations in imposing sanctions on Belarusian leaders.

White House press secretary Scott McClellan told reporters, "The United States calls on authorities in Belarus to release without delay the hundreds of citizens who have been detained not only in the past 24 hours but in recent days and weeks simply for expressing their political views."

Prominent Belarus exile thrilled by Minsk protest (*GATINEAU, Quebec*, by David Ljunggren, March 29, 2006) —

After spending decades in a heartfelt and often frustrating effort to gain independence for her native Belarus, prominent Canada-based exile Ivonka Survilla, head of the governing council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, finally thinks events might be turning in her favor. Survilla said she was thrilled the world was finally paying attention to events in her homeland, where around 10,000 people have been protesting in the capital Minsk against Lukashenko's reelection victory in a March 19 vote.

"He (Lukashenko) has all the advantages except the people, who have woken up. I think these are people who have sworn on their honour that they will never be afraid, that they will fight until the end. He will lose," said Survilla.

Double Standard for Dictators (*The Washington Post*, April 14, 2006) — The European Union banned the Belarusian president and 30 of his aides and political collaborators from entering any of the union's 25 countries in response to rigged elections and arrests of protesters.

At the same time, they were quietly preparing to approve a trade agreement with Turkmenistan -- home to "president for life"

Turkmenbashi the Great and large supplies of natural gas. Unfortunately for Lukashenka, Belarus was not so blessed...

Chernobyl still poisons bodies and minds (*Chicago Tribune*, by Alex Rodriguez, Tribune foreign correspondent, April 23, 2006) — Although Cesium-137 from the Chernobyl accident tainted a quarter of Belarus' farmland, many in Belarus say their families have no choice but to eat contaminated food. 20 years after the world's worst nuclear accident, millions have sunk into an apathy that lets them eat yields of land they know is tainted.

Imperialist Gas (*The Washington Post* — Editorial, April 23, 2006) — After reports of British unease at the possibility that Gazprom, the Russian state-controlled gas exporter, might seek to purchase Britain's largest gas company, Alexei Miller, the chairman of Gazprom, crudely threatened E.U. governments that his company will sell its product in other markets unless they give way to its "international ambitions."

Mr. Miller denounced supposed Western attempts to "politicize questions of gas supply," even though Mr. Putin is overtly using Gazprom and its near-monopoly control of energy and pipelines to restore Moscow's dominion over neighbors such as Belarus and Armenia.

In another case of economic blackmail, Russia abruptly banned the import of Georgian and Moldovan wines after arguments by Georgia and Moldova that Russia should not be allowed into the World Trade Organization until it stops supporting separatist regimes on their territories and removes troops it was bound to withdraw years ago.

At a G-8 meeting in Moscow, U.S. and European diplomats insisted that Belarus, Georgia and Moldova be added to the agenda for discussions at preparatory meetings leading up to the summit. That should make it hard for Mr. Putin to exclude a review of his bullying at the summit itself.

Strong Rebuke for the Kremlin From Cheney (*The New York Times*, by Steven Lee Myers, Thom Shanker contributed reporting from Washington for this article, May 5, 2006). — Vice President Dick Cheney on Thursday delivered the Bush administration's strongest rebuke of Russia to date. He said the Russian government "unfairly and improperly restricted" people's rights and suggested that it sought to undermine its neighbors and to use the country's vast resources of oil and gas as "tools of intimidation or blackmail."

Mr. Cheney also reiterated the administration's strong condemnation of Belarus, stating "There is no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind," calling Mr. Lukashenka's government "the last dictatorship in Europe."

U.S. Warns Russia to Act More Like A Democracy (*The Washington Post*, by Peter Baker Washington Post Staff Writer, May 5, 2006) — The Bush administration has warned Russia that the upcoming summit of the Group of Eight nations in St. Petersburg could be a debacle unless the Kremlin takes specific actions in the coming weeks to demonstrate a commitment to democracy.

Some critics, including Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), have called on Bush to boycott the G-8 summit in protest of Putin's suppression of dissent, but the president has rejected such a move as counterproductive.

The summit, set for July 15-17, has forced administration officials to rethink their approach to Russia for fear that the meeting will be consumed with questions about why the leaders of

the world's leading democracies would seemingly ignore Putin's crackdown on internal opposition.

Poland revives cold-war tactic: democracy via radio (*The Christian Science Monitor*; by Andrew Curry, May 11, 2006) — A Polish-funded team of reporters is offering an alternative to the state media monopoly in neighboring Belarus.

An evening program of news and music, Radio Racja is beamed nightly from AM and short-wave transmitters in Poland and Lithuania to Belarus. Begun in 1999 with American funding, the money ran out in 2002. It was reopened just weeks before Belarus's March elections this year with funding from the Polish government.

According to Jan Malicki, head of the University of Warsaw's East European Studies Center, "The citizens of Belarus deserve more sources of information than just Belarusian state TV."

LETTERS

From a letter by an educational activist whose identity needs to be protected.

By the end of March, Belarus became a different country. It was interesting to note how a friend, having spent 15 days in detention without access to any news, couldn't comprehend what was happening. The elections had helped people to stop hiding. I don't know why it happened. One no longer heard the admonishment "sit quietly, maybe they won't bother you". People started to voice their views openly, and the society appeared openly divided. We can now readily see who is 'ours'. Before, we had to search for them ...

I'd be very unhappy if things returned to the way they were before. I feel that this process that so unnerves the authorities, should not stop. They should no longer feel secure in the regime's lifelong protection. Any international response is important, because the (regime's) lackeys don't want to see their names black-listed ...

Two students who worked with me have been arrested. I was concerned that their parents would not only not support them, they'd be angry at us as well, for failing to protect them. Actually, the opposite occurred. The parents said they were very proud of their children. Their classmates and even some lecturers treated them with greater respect. The dean and the rector, seeing such support, have so far been loath to punish them, fearing the reaction. Before the elections this would have been unfathomable — the girls would have been expelled the next day ...

At the polling station that I monitored, of the 650 voters who cast their ballots on the day of election, 510 were officially recorded for Milinkevich. We have indeed been developing ways of keeping the local electoral commission honest! Professor L. achieved (a similar result). The official tally at his polling station showed Lukashenka to be the loser ...

Now, we are returning to our educational work. We are thinking about how to reorient the educational process, so it would work for 'today, rather than for the day after tomorrow'. We plan to incorporate more decisiveness into our texts and seminars. We no longer should hide behind cultural and folkloric themes. Everything should be aimed at the goal of democracy.

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